United Nations S/PV.6293

Security Council

Sixty-fifth year

Provisional

6293rd meeting

Tuesday, 6 April 2010, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Takasu	(Japan)
Members:	Austria	Mr. Ebner
	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Mr. Barbalić
	Brazil	Mrs. Viotti
	China	Mr. Long Zhou
	France	Mr. De Rivière
	Gabon	Mr. Issoze-Ngondet
	Lebanon	Mr. Salam
	Mexico	Mr. Heller
	Nigeria	Mr. Onowu
	Russian Federation	Mr. Dolgov
	Turkey	Mr. Apakan
	Uganda	Mr. Rugunda
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Parham
	United States of America	Ms. Rice

Agenda

The situation concerning Iraq

First report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 3 of resolution 1905 (2009) (S/2010/166)

Letter dated 18 March 2010 from the Permanent Representative of Iraq addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2010/153)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-506.

10-30443 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Expression of thanks to the retiring President

The President: As this is the first meeting of the Security Council for the month of April, I should like to take this opportunity to pay tribute, on behalf of the Council, to His Excellency Mr. Emanuel Issoze-Ngondet, Permanent Representative of Gabon, for his excellent stewardship as President of the Security Council for the month of March 2010. I am sure I speak for all members in expressing deep appreciation to Ambassador Issoze-Ngondet and his able team for their productivity and the great diplomatic skill with which they conducted the Council's business last month. We are very grateful to them.

Also, as this is the first time that the Council is meeting in this new temporary Chamber, I should like to say that there may be some inconveniences for members of the Council and for those attending meetings. But I hope we will make the best use of this arrangement.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning Iraq

First report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 3 of resolution 1905 (2009) (S/2010/166)

Letter dated 18 March 2010 from the Permanent Representative of Iraq addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2010/153)

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Iraq, in which he requests that Mr. Abdul Basit Turky Saed, head of Iraq's Committee of Financial Experts, be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite Mr. Turky Saed to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Turky Saed (Iraq) took a seat at the Council table.

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council also agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Jun Yamazaki, Controller of the United Nations.

It is so decided.

I invite Mr. Yamazaki to take a seat at the Council table.

I welcome Mr. Turky Saed and Mr. Yamazaki to the Council.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

I would like draw the attention of Council members to document S/2010/166, which contains the first report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 3 of resolution 1905 (2009), as well as to document S/2010/153, which contains the text of a letter dated 18 March 2010 from the Permanent Representative of Iraq addressed to the President of the Security Council.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear two briefings, first from Mr. Turky Saed and, subsequently, from Mr. Yamazaki. I now give the floor to Mr. Turky Saed.

Mr. Turky Saed (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Government of Iraq has submitted to the Security Council its report pursuant to paragraph 5 of resolution 1905 (2009) (see S/2010/153). The Secretariat has distributed copies of the report to Council members. The resolution stipulates that the report should address three elements: establishment of an action plan and timeline for transition from the Development Fund for Iraq to an alternative system; settlement of debts and claims inherited from the previous regime; and an assessment of the progress made in strengthening financial and administrative oversight of the Fund.

The Iraqi Government has set up an action plan and timeline for the transition from the Development Fund for Iraq to alternative arrangements, with a view to ensuring the transition, by 31 December 2010, to a successor mechanism that includes external audit

arrangements and that enables Iraq to honour its commitments as stipulated in paragraph 21 of resolution 1483 (2003). The main elements of this action plan involve maintaining the same mechanisms currently adopted for the Development Fund for Iraq by using bank accounts opened at the Federal Reserve Bank in New York to ensure central deposit of the proceeds from the sale of oil, petroleum products and natural gas, as an alternative to the Oil Proceeds Receipts Account, while continuing the automatic deposit of compensation, as provided for in paragraph 21 of the resolution just mentioned and in subsequent other relevant resolutions. The Ministry of Finance has exclusive authority over the account for the deposit of oil and gas proceeds once the compensation percentage has been deducted.

The Committee of Financial Experts will take over from the International Advisory and Monitoring Board with respect to supervising the flow of cash to the special account, in accordance with the rules of procedure already approved by the Iraqi Council of Ministers. These rules cover, inter alia, the Committee's power to appoint an international auditing institution to audit the account and carry out follow-up work, to approve the results of the audits and the final spreadsheets for the account, for each financial period; to follow up on comments in the oversight reports; and to publish all relevant data, the Committee's meeting records and follow-up reports on its website for access by all Governments.

The Iraqi Government's report includes an annex setting out the timeline for the successor mechanism in the run-up to its formation and the start of its work.

Iraq is undoubtedly concerned that, should the Fund be closed on 31 January 2011, immunity for Iraqi funds deposited abroad might be lifted.

The Government report analyses the action plan for the settlement of debts and claims of the previous regime in 2010. The total outstanding debt was $129 billion, of which we have settled $89.222 billion; $39 billion remains, including $26 billion to the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf. The Paris Club agreement was the most important debt settlement agreement, through which we have settled more than $51 billion in debt. There were 55 creditor States outside the Paris Club, and we have succeeded in reaching settlements with them under conditions similar to those agreed on with the Paris Club, apart from 13 States, including those of the Gulf Cooperation Council. Efforts are under way to reach similar settlements with them.

Concerning commercial creditors, settlements have been concluded with 576 creditors, in the amount of $20.9 billion. This process continues with other creditors. Iraq expresses its appreciation to the remaining creditors whose debts, totalling $629 million, have yet to be settled.

The Iraqi Government has reaffirmed its commitment to settle all debts and claims from the previous regime and to continue to address the issue until it is completely resolved. We hope that the international community will continue its assistance until the Iraqi Government has completed its efforts in that regard.

Concerning follow-up to the international auditing companies' reports by the Committee of Financial Experts, and the contacts with the compensation office in Geneva — given the Iraqi Government's constant commitment to international resolutions and given that the Committee has noted a genuine interest in resolving these cases — the Committee believes that it is high time for the Security Council, given its legal and moral authority and the active role played by its members, to help press the relevant parties to reconsider the remaining compensation imposed on Iraq. Because Iraq's economic infrastructure has been completely destroyed, it would be fair to at least consider applying the Paris Club settlement principle adopted by the international community to remaining compensation.

The Iraqi people have suffered enormously, but they have nonetheless been involved in taking decisions about their future. The Committee trusts that international resolutions will be fair and will not obstruct a review of past resolutions on these matters.

Without the support of the international community, it would not have been possible to make the reimbursements that we have made. To resolve the problem fully, that support should continue in the future. The Committee of Financial Experts, in particular following the adoption of resolution 1905 (2009), has monitored these Iraqi Government efforts. Given that the amounts owed by Iraq are exorbitant, representing more than half its annual budget, and given that 2010 has been a year that has seen legislative elections on the basis of which consultations

on the formation of a Government are likely to drag on for months, we consider that ensuring continued immunity, though an international resolution, could be a step forward by the Security Council towards resolving this problem.

In order to objectively evaluate progress in State oversight, the Iraqi Government has established a set of quantifiable goals. Attaining these could result in significant development of the administrative and financial audit system. Details may be found in the Government's report.

Let me note also that with regard to the measurement and metering system for the production, distribution and export of crude oil, the Board's discussions have underscored that all oil exports have been registered in the Oil Proceeds Receipts Account since the end of the barter system of oil for electricity in 2007 and for the export of oil products in the second half of 2009. Furthermore, in setting up the system of auditors, we hope to adapt our criteria to our work on the ground. We hope to have this done by 2011. We have established all-ministry specialized committees to address the tasks necessary to providing a detailed audit. The committees are pursuing these efforts.

In the report to be presented by 1 July 2010, pursuant to the provisions of resolution 1905 (2009), the Committee of Financial Experts will seek to provide the Security Council with information on the system's success rate.

The President: I thank Mr. Turky Saed for his very comprehensive briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Yamazaki.

Mr. Yamazaki: I thank you, Sir, for the opportunity to apprise the Council on progress made in strengthening financial and administrative oversight of the current Development Fund for Iraq; on the legal issues and options to be considered for implementing successor arrangements; and on the assessment of the Government of Iraq's progress in preparing for the successor arrangements for the Fund, as presented in the Secretary-General's report (S/2010/166), pursuant to paragraph 3 of resolution 1905 (2009).

With regard to the first issue — the activities of the Fund and the International Advisory and Monitoring Board — in its meeting in Vienna on 22 and 23 July 2009, the Board called for the timely monthly publication of the Fund's financial statements on the website of the Committee of Financial Experts. I am pleased to note that the Committee has published monthly summaries of the Fund's cash inflows and outflows on its website.

In the absence of a fully operational comprehensive oil-metering system, it is not possible reliably to determine the volume of all export sales of petroleum, petroleum products and natural gas from Iraq, for which proceeds are to be deposited in the oil proceeds receipts account and the Development Fund for Iraq accounts. In this respect, I am pleased to report that the Government of Iraq has finalized a time-bound action plan to implement a fully operational comprehensive oil-metering system. The action plan and the implementation status are available on the websites of the International Advisory and Monitoring Board and Committee of Financial Experts. I welcome the detailed update from the Committee and strongly urge the full implementation of the action plan, as envisaged by the Government of Iraq.

I now turn to the legal issues and options relating to the successor arrangements for the Development Fund for Iraq. First, with respect to the Iraq escrow account and other transfers to the Development Fund, once all outstanding activities under the oil-for-food programme are concluded, and taking into account issues mentioned in the Secretary-General's report, all other remaining funds should be transferred from the Iraq escrow account to the Fund. While the processing of the authentication documents has been slow, as reported in the Secretary-General's status report to the President of the Security Council of 1 May 2009 (S/2009/230) and the report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 5 of resolution 1859 (2008) dated 27 July 2009 (S/2009/385), the number of outstanding letters of credit had been reduced significantly to 65 as of 31 March 2010.

Absent the receipt by the Secretariat of the requisite confirmation of arrival of goods in Iraq, the Security Council has the option of cancelling the remaining letters of credit with outstanding claims of delivery, subject to the provision by the Government of Iraq of a comprehensive indemnity with regard to all activities of the Organization, its representatives and agents in connection with the oil-for-food programme since its inception.

I now turn to the issue of obligatory payments to the United Nations Compensation Fund. It should be

recalled that, in paragraph 21 of resolution 1483 (2003), the Security Council decided not only that 5 per cent of the proceeds of all export sales of petroleum, petroleum products and natural gas from Iraq should be deposited into the Compensation Fund, but also that "this requirement shall be binding on a properly constituted, internationally recognized representative Government of Iraq and any successor thereto". Therefore, it is important to ensure that the present mechanism is maintained or that an alternative, equally effective mechanism is established to ensure the payment into the Compensation Fund.

I now turn to the issue of the privileges and immunities of the Development Fund for Iraq. From its inception in 2003, it was clearly understood that the Fund would enjoy such privileges and immunities for a limited and specified period of time. Therefore, once the Fund becomes a fully nationally owned and controlled fund, unless otherwise decided by the Security Council it will cease to enjoy such privileges and immunities.

I now turn to the issue of the dissolution of the International Advisory and Monitoring Board. Further to the extension of its mandate through 31 December 2010 in resolution 1905 (2009), and in accordance with section 9 B of the revised terms of reference of the Advisory Board, "arrangements will be made for the prompt dissolution of the International Advisory and Monitoring Board no later than 31 December 2010".

Lastly, I will turn to the assessment of the progress of the Government of Iraq in preparing for the successor arrangements for the Development Fund for Iraq. The action plan and timeline, as presented by the Government of Iraq, are realistic, and I am pleased that the Government of Iraq plans to select an independent international auditor to confirm that all proceeds of export sales of petroleum, petroleum products and natural gas from Iraq are accounted for. Furthermore, I note that the Government of Iraq, in its first quarterly report to the Security Council, acknowledges its obligations towards the Compensation Fund pursuant to paragraph 21 of resolution 1483 (2003).

As I mentioned earlier during this briefing, the Committee of Financial Experts has finalized a time-bound action plan to implement a fully operational comprehensive oil-metering system, and I encourage the Government of Iraq to provide an update on this matter in its next quarterly report to the Security Council.

With regard to the details on the progress made in strengthening financial and administrative oversight of the current Development Fund for Iraq, I note that certain measures and goals have been included in the report submitted by Iraq. Furthermore, I note that the secretariat of the Council of Ministers will ensure that deadlines for the completion of these goals are met. I encourage the Government of Iraq to keep the Security Council informed and to include the update on the implementation in their next quarterly report to the Security Council.

Work remains to be done to fully implement the action plan, as presented by the Government of Iraq, for the transition to successor arrangements for the Development Fund for Iraq. I look forward to keeping the Security Council informed on progress made by the Government of Iraq in preparing for such arrangements.

This completes my briefing on the report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 3 of resolution 1905 (2009). I would be happy to respond to any questions from members of the Council relating to the report.

The President: I thank Mr. Yamazaki for his briefing. The two briefings, by Mr. Turky Saed, from the Iraqi side, and by Mr. Yamazaki, from the Secretary-General's side, complement each other and will inform the Council's work.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.35 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.6294

Security Council

Distr.: General
7 April 2010

Original: English

Official communiqué of the 6294th (closed) meeting of the Security Council

Held in private at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 7 April 2010, at 10 a.m.

In accordance with rule 55 of the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council, the following communiqué was issued through the Secretary-General in place of a verbatim record:

"On 7 April 2010, the Security Council, pursuant to resolution 1353 (2001), annex II, sections A and B, held its 6294th meeting in private with the troop- and police-contributing countries to the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

"The Security Council and the troop- and police-contributing countries heard a briefing under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure by Mr. Alan Doss, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

"Members of the Council, Mr. Doss and representatives of participating contributing countries had an exchange of views."

10-30067 (E) 070410

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United Nations S/PV.6295

Security Council

Distr.: General
9 April 2010

Original: English

Official communiqué of the 6295th (closed) meeting of the Security Council

Held in private at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 9 April 2010, at 10 a.m.

In accordance with rule 55 of the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council, the following communiqué was issued through the Secretary-General in place of a verbatim record.

On 9 April 2010, the Security Council, pursuant to resolution 1353 (2001), annex II, sections A and B, held its 6295th meeting in private with the troop- and police-contributing countries to the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara.

The Security Council and the troop- and police-contributing countries heard a briefing under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure by Mr. Wolfgang Weisbrod-Weber, Director of Asia and Middle East Division of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

10-30429 (E) 090410

Please recycle

United Nations S/PV

Security Council

Distr.: General
9 April 2010

Original: English

Official communiqué of the 6296th (closed) meeting of the Security Council

Held in private at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 9 April 2010, at 11 a.m.

In accordance with rule 55 of the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council, the following communiqué was issued through the Secretary-General in place of a verbatim record:

"On 9 April 2010, the Security Council, pursuant to resolution 1353 (2001), annex II, sections A and B, held its 6296th meeting in private with the troop- and police-contributing countries to the United Nations Mission in the Sudan.

"The Security Council and the troop- and police-contributing countries heard a briefing under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure by Mr. Jack Christofides, Principal Officer in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

"Members of the Council, Mr. Christofides and representatives of participating contributing countries had an exchange of views."

10-30456 (E) 090410

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United Nations S PV 6297

Security Council

Sixty-fifth year

Provisional

6297th meeting

Tuesday, 13 April 2010, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Takasu	(Japan)
Members:	Austria	Mr. Mayr-Harting
	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Mr. Barbalić
	Brazil	Mrs. Viotti
	China	Mr. Du Xiaocong
	France	Mr. Araud
	Gabon	Mr. Moungara Moussotsi
	Lebanon	Mr. Salam
	Mexico	Mr. Puente
	Nigeria	Mr. Lolo
	Russian Federation	Mr. Pankin
	Turkey	Mr. Apakan
	Uganda	Mr. Rugunda
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Ms. Rice

Agenda

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Thirty-first report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2010/164)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-506.

10-31160 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Minute of silence

The President: At the outset of the meeting, I should like, on behalf of the members of the Security Council, to express our deepest sympathy to the Government and people of Poland in connection with the tragic plane crash on 10 April that killed President Kaczynski, the First Lady and a large number of senior Polish officials.

May I ask the members of the Security Council to join me in observing a minute of silence to honour the memory of those who perished in that tragic incident.

The members of the Security Council observed a minute of silence.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Thirty-first report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2010/164)

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in which he requests to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite that representative to participate in the consideration of the item without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Mukongo Ngay (Democratic Republic of the Congo) took a seat at the Council table.

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Alan Doss, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

It is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

I wish to draw the attention of members to document S/2010/164, which contains the thirty-first report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. Alan Doss. I now give the floor to Mr. Doss.

Mr. Doss (*spoke in French*): Four months ago, the Security Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC), emphasizing three essential tasks: the protection of civilian populations; the disarmament, demobilization and repatriation or reintegration of Congolese or foreign armed groups; and support for the Government's efforts to reform the security sector. Although progress has not been consistent across all these areas, we have, however, made considerable progress. Today I would like to outline some of the elements key to the implementation of our mandate and also describe the challenges we face.

(*spoke in English*)

As regards the first priority of the Mission, we have pursued and reinforced our earlier efforts to enhance the effective protection of civilians. These efforts have been directed at two key objectives: first, increasing MONUC presence and situational awareness in the areas most vulnerable to violence; and secondly, working with the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC), the Congolese army, to improve conduct and discipline during forward operations.

To achieve the first objective we have multiplied the deployments of the Joint Protection Teams (JPT). Eighty-seven Joint Protection Team missions have been deployed, including 22 since the beginning of this year, and as in the past, they have assisted the Blue Helmets in identifying, preventing and reacting to security

threats, often through the establishment of local early warning committees.

Additional military bases, many of them located in very remote areas, have been established in the Kivus and the areas of Orientale Province affected by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), bringing their total number to 73; this has been accompanied by more frequent patrolling in the most security-sensitive areas. The deployment of these bases and the JPT missions is guided by the Rapid Response and Early Warning Cell, established at MONUC headquarters as well as in the field. These draw on information from a variety of sources and try to identify trends and emerging threats in order to direct our military resources towards prevention or response actions. The effective protection of civilians relies on this capacity to analyse and anticipate threats and to prevent them from materializing.

As regards the second objective, in line with President Kabila's declared zero-tolerance policy and the provisions of the policy governing MONUC support to the FARDC, MONUC now provides assistance to the 18 battalions specifically designated to carry out operations against the Forces démocratiques de liberation du Rwanda (FDLR) in the context of Operation Amani Leo, and only when such targeted operations have been jointly planned to take account of civilian protection. In agreement with the High Command of the FARDC, the officers commanding these strike battalions and the chain of command have been screened to make sure they do not have a history of human rights violations, and they report directly to the North and South Kivu operations commanders of Operation Amani Leo.

The FARDC has taken some important measures to curb indiscipline and to fight impunity. Operational military courts have initiated around 42 trials over the past year and have condemned at least 25 officers and soldiers. The number of soldiers prosecuted for serious offences has increased substantially, but this is an area that still needs significant improvement, and MONUC, through the Joint Human Rights Office and the Rule of Law Section, is providing support for joint investigation teams and prosecution support cells in the FARDC. These initiatives warrant further assistance, and MONUC is working with partners to mobilize such assistance. Nevertheless, discipline is likely to remain a constant concern as long as the structural problems of the Congolese army are not fully resolved. These include persistent delays in the payment of salaries, insufficient supplies and a very low level of training of many troops, especially those who have been integrated from the various armed groups. These are issues that need to be addressed as part of the security sector reform effort.

The humanitarian situation in the Kivus and parts of Orientale Province remains of deep concern, with a large number of internally displaced persons, high levels of sexual violence against women and attacks on humanitarian workers. But security has gradually improved in several territories in the Kivus and the economic tempo is picking up in consequence; close to one million internally displaced persons (IDPs) have returned to their areas of origin, and all the major IDP camps around Goma have now been closed. Unfortunately, however, violence against civilians is increasingly perpetrated by criminal elements in both North and South Kivu, which points to the need for an enhanced police presence to secure public order.

MONUC's support to the Government in its struggle against the armed groups has focused on the FDLR, the ex-Interahamwe Rwandan forces, which is now the major source of violence and instability in the Kivus. Due to steady military pressure from the FARDC and outreach from the MONUC's disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation or resettlement (DDRRR) team — the reintegration support team — the FDLR continues to suffer a steady erosion in the number and capability of its forces. The recent actions by the authorities in some European countries against the FDLR expatriate leadership are welcome and will help the efforts on the ground in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to dismantle the FDLR.

Despite this progress, we cannot afford to relax in our common endeavour to end the menace of the FDLR. The FDLR leadership remains at large and the group is still carrying out violent reprisals against civilians, as well as abductions. As a result, the Amani Leo strategy has been designed to encompass both protection and offensive dimensions and must be sustained to ensure that the population is secured and that targeted operations against the FDLR command continue.

Elements of the Congrès national pour la défense du peuple (CNDP) have continued to maintain parallel administrative structures and tax collection in Masisi

territory. This has provoked serious tensions with local communities as well as threats against MONUC by some former CNDP military commanders now integrated in the FARDC. A number of the provisions of the 23 March agreements — the amnesty law and the release of political prisoners, the treatment of the war-wounded, the signing of the tripartite agreement for the return of refugees from Rwanda and the appointment of territorial administrators — have been implemented by the Government. But other provisions are still outstanding, notably the announcement of the outcome of the commission on military ranks, which has created dissatisfaction among officers who have been recently integrated into the FARDC from the armed groups.

The LRA attacks in Orientale Province remain a serious concern as well. While we agree with the Congolese authorities that the number of LRA combatants has been significantly reduced, the extraordinary brutality of the LRA and the practice of turning abductees into new fighters continue to destabilize the territories of Haut- and Bas-Uélé in Orientale Province. The FARDC, with the support of MONUC, has established security perimeters around the main population centres and secured the main roads through frequent patrols. But the LRA is an elusive enemy, and we cannot discount the possibility of renewed attacks against population centres and isolated communities, using hit-and-run tactics, as has been the case in the more remote areas, and notably, just before Christmas, in the area of Tapila, with disastrous consequences for that community.

As long as the LRA commanders remain at large and are able to operate across borders in three countries, the group will continue to pose a serious protection challenge. The Governments of the countries affected, together with the international partners, need to work closely together in order to eliminate the LRA threat once and for all, which requires greater real-time intelligence sharing, enhanced air mobility and special force operations to interdict the movement of the armed bands.

In the meantime, MONUC's efforts to sensitize the LRA rank and file have led to some surrenders — 53 since the beginning of last year, which is a significant number considering the overall size of the group still present in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This is encouraging, although the LRA continues with abductions to fill some its gaps, so the struggle against the LRA must continue.

Small-scale rebel activity is present in southern Ituri in Orientale province, where MONUC is working closely with the FARDC to restore lasting security in the affected areas and to facilitate the deployment of the police. In recent weeks, we have assisted more than 2,000 villagers to return home after they fled military operations in this area.

In the north-west of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a new and unanticipated challenged emerged late last year. A long-simmering ethnic conflict over fishing rights in northern Equateur province escalated with an attack of the rebels on the provincial capital Mbandaka on Easter Sunday. The attack was repelled by Government forces with the aid of MONUC. Unfortunately, the losses suffered by the civilian population and the security forces were quite high and, tragically MONUC, lost one soldier and two contractual agents.

The capacity of the national security forces to respond to such threats in remote areas is still limited because of capacity constraints. The Mission must be prepared therefore to offer logistic support, if requested and within the limits of its resources, to counter armed threats to the constitutional order or to help contain conflicts with the potential of escalating and threatening the security of civilians.

As indicated in the Secretary-General's report (S/2010/164), a set of laws has been submitted to Parliament covering defence and army regulation, together with a law for the National Police. We hope that this legislation will be adopted during the current session of Parliament as a basis for moving ahead with the reform plan for the army that was developed by the Government last year.

Even in the absence of this legislative framework, there has been some progress in police training and deployment along the main axes in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as in army training by several bilateral partners. Key decisions have also been made concerning the establishment of garrisons in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Work is progressing on three sites in South Kivu and will soon start in North Kivu. These are important steps, but additional, harmonized efforts will be required to help build the capacities of the

Government to fully ensure the protection of the population in years to come.

In pursuance of the mandate that the Security Council has given MONUC in resolution 1906 (2009), we have established an ambassadors' forum in Kinshasa to facilitate a regular dialogue among partners and with the Government on various aspects of security sector reform, while emphasizing that the Government itself must take the lead role in coordination. We have encouraged the Government to engage its international partners in a strategic dialogue based on the army reform plan developed by the military authorities so as to dispose of a nucleus of well-trained forces that will take over MONUC's residual security responsibilities as its forces leave the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We have also encouraged the Government to develop a national security policy and to build the capacities for national security coordination, including the oversight of the various components of the national security architecture.

I would now like to speak about MONUC's reconfiguration and drawdown. In paragraph 2 of resolution 1906 (2009), the Security Council has referred to "critical tasks that need to be accomplished before MONUC can envisage its drawdown without triggering a relapse into instability". These tasks were assessed by the technical assessment team led by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations that visited the Democratic Republic of the Congo in March. The findings of the team have been summarized in the Secretary-General's report before the Council.

In the light of the team's findings, Under-Secretary General Le Roy, in his meetings with President Kabila and Prime Minister Muzito, urged a prudent approach to MONUC's drawdown. The President explained his vision for the future of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, emphasizing the need for the country to rely on its own capacities, and in that context presented a much briefer timetable to implement the drawdown, indicating that he would wish for the drawdown to be completed by June 2011. The essential elements of those discussions are outlined in the report of the Secretary-General, and there is no need for me to repeat them here.

In acknowledgement of the President's vision, the Secretary-General's report recommends that the first stage of the drawdown be initiated before 30 June 2010, subject to the Council's concurrence. MONUC believes that this is operationally feasible. Following that stage, a review of the security situation in areas of MONUC deployment would be conducted by a joint Government/MONUC coordination mechanism to be established for that purpose. The first such review would take place in September this year and a second in March next year. These reviews would focus on progress on military operations against armed groups, the deployment of security forces to assume MONUC protection task, and the establishment of State authority in areas freed of armed groups. They would be the trigger for the planning of subsequent phases of the drawdown, based on the principle of national self-reliance put forward by President Kabila.

During the Council's forthcoming visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, I am sure that members will engage with the Government in order to determine how the drawdown can be best shaped and implemented without compromising the achievements of the past decade, for which we have all worked so hard.

As regards the Mission's reconfiguration, again the Secretary-General's report puts forward a proposal which is meant to anticipate and address the remaining critical tasks. The protection of civilians under imminent threat of violence should remain a primary concern of the Mission. Protection requires continued support to build State capacity, reinforce the rule of law and bolster compliance with international humanitarian law, human rights and refugee law. Strengthening the National Police is a critical dimension of the work to extend and reinforce protection. We are pleased, therefore, that the Government has requested MONUC assistance in this area.

As regards the military dimensions of security sector reform, the Government has made it clear that it wishes to largely rely on bilateral aid for building up the capabilities of the army. However, the Government has also indicated that it would welcome MONUC assistance to train and deploy three military police battalions and build capacity for military justice, which would further enhance our ongoing protection work.

As indicated in the Secretary-General's report, MONUC should also progressively shift its focus and structure towards post-conflict stabilization and peace consolidation, based on an expanded partnership with

the United Nations country team. The Integrated Strategic Framework, which we are currently discussing with the Government, is intended as a road map to help us move in that direction, in line with Congolese priorities.

We have already worked closely with the United Nations country team to provide coordinated support for the implementation of the Government's Stabilization and Reconstruction Plan for conflict-affected areas, which is gaining momentum and producing results on the ground. A recent strategic evaluation of the International Security and Stabilization Support Strategy, conducted in cooperation with key donors, is recommending increased support in order to sustain what needs to be a long-term undertaking to accompany the transition towards development.

The sustainability of the peace process will eventually depend on the success of these efforts to stimulate recovery and reconstruction and to ensure the effective presence and authority of the State and the consolidation of democratic structures. But endemic poverty, lack of employment for demobilized combatants, the competition for economic resources — including land and minerals — and the return of internally displaced persons and refugees are all potential sources of tension and violence that need to be carefully managed. This is why we need to reshape the Mission to enhance the capacity of the United Nations system and MONUC to assist the Government to address these challenges during and after the drawdown. These issues are the key to consolidating the peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and not only in the East.

President Kabila has reassured the Congolese public of the Government's firm intention to hold elections in 2011. The Government is currently reviewing the calendar with the inter-institutional forum. We have been informed that a timetable for the elections is to be published shortly, together with an indication of what support will be requested from the international community and MONUC. The legislature is currently working on the legislation needed to prepare those elections. The adoption of that legislation, in particular as concerns the delineation of local constituencies and the national elections commission, is urgent in order to adhere to the constitutional calendar.

As we reflect on the future, I would now like to recall some words from the past.

> "The end of all political effort must be the well-being of the individual in a life of safety and freedom. In the case of the Congo, as elsewhere, the means to this end are, in the first place, the independence, peace, integrity and prosperity of the country." (*A/PV.906, para. 16*)

(*spoke in French*)

Those words were spoken 50 years ago by Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld. They are still relevant today as the Democratic Republic of the Congo prepares to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of its independence. From the beginning, the United Nations has been a partner and friend of the Congo. I am confident that this relationship will continue as the country begins a new era of sovereign independence.

The President: I thank Mr. Doss for his comprehensive briefing.

There are no further speakers inscribed on my list this morning. In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion.

The meeting rose at 10.35 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.6298

Security Council

Sixty-fifth year

Provisional

6298th meeting

Wednesday, 14 April 2010, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Takasu	(Japan)
Members:	Austria	Mr. Mayr-Harting
	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Mr. Barbalić
	Brazil	Mrs. Viotti
	China	Mr. Long Zhou
	France	Mr. Araud
	Gabon	Mr. Issoze-Ngondet
	Lebanon	Mr. Salam
	Mexico	Mr. Heller
	Nigeria	Mr. Onemola
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Turkey	Mr. Apakan
	Uganda	Mr. Rugunda
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Mr. Wolff

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-506.

10-31334 (E)

Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Botswana, Cuba, Egypt, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Malaysia, Morocco, Nicaragua, Norway, Pakistan, South Africa, Sri Lanka, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, in which they request to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, the representatives of the aforementioned countries took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 8 April 2010 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, which will be issued as document S/2010/182 and which reads as follows:

> "I have the honour to request that, in accordance with its previous practice, the Security Council invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the Security Council open debate that will be held on Wednesday, 14 April 2010, regarding the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question."

I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to participate in the meeting in accordance with the rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 12 April 2010 from His Excellency Mr. Zahir Tanin, in which he requests to be invited, in his capacity as Vice-Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. If I hear no objection, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to His Excellency Mr. Zahir Tanin.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I invite Mr. Tanin to take the seat reserved for him at the side of the Council Chamber.

I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from His Excellency Mr. Pedro Serrano, in which he requests to be invited, in his capacity as acting head of the delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. If I hear no objection, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to His Excellency Mr. Pedro Serrano.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I invite Mr. Serrano to take the seat reserved for him at the side of the Council Chamber.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. Lynn Pascoe. I now give the floor to Mr. Pascoe.

Mr. Pascoe: Since the Secretary-General briefed the Council on 24 March, efforts aimed at bringing about the conditions for a resumption of Israeli-Palestinian talks have continued, including through a

meeting between President Obama and Prime Minister Netanyahu in late March. The situation on the ground remains fragile and a crisis of confidence between the parties has so far prevented the resumption of talks. The United Nations will continue to engage with its Quartet partners to ensure that the circumstances which made it possible to agree to launch the proximity talks be respected.

The Secretary-General attended the League of Arab States summit on 26 and 27 March, at which he briefed Arab leaders on the meeting of the Quartet in Moscow and his visit to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory. He met with Secretary General Amre Moussa, with whom he discussed the full range of issues of mutual interest to the United Nations and the Arab League. In his address to the summit, the Secretary-General encouraged Arab leaders to continue to support Palestinian participation in talks on the goal of the creation of an independent Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbours. He emphasized that this goal can be brought about only through a return of the parties to the negotiating table and testing their commitment in that framework.

The summit condemned Israeli actions on the ground, in particular in East Jerusalem, and conditioned continued Arab support for Palestinian participation in proximity talks on the outcome of the United States efforts to create conditions conducive to the success of negotiations. In their concluding statement, Arab leaders reconfirmed their endorsement of the Arab Peace Initiative and pledged $500 million to support the Palestinian population in East Jerusalem.

The Secretary-General also held discussions with Palestinian President Abbas in the margins of the League of Arab States summit. He reiterated to the President his own and the Quartet's support for negotiations on all core issues.

Turning to the situation on the ground, the Israeli Government's partial restraint on settlement construction in the West Bank remains in effect and, as previously noted, has led to a reduction in construction activity despite some violations. Although these developments are welcome, this policy falls short of Israel's Road Map obligation to a full settlement freeze and excludes settlement activity in East Jerusalem. The Secretary-General has reiterated that all settlement activity is illegal and must stop. He urged that the restraint be expanded into a comprehensive freeze of all settlement activity.

As a result of the transfer of Israeli settlers into the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah, there were further incidents of violence between Palestinian residents and the settlers. We note that there have been no house demolitions carried out in East Jerusalem since January this year. We hope that this positive development will continue.

In the West Bank, there were almost daily clashes between settlers and Palestinians during the reporting period, as well as incidents of stone-throwing at Israeli vehicles. These incidents caused four Palestinian injuries; two further Palestinians were injured and a Palestinian youth was killed in three incidents of Palestinians being hit by vehicles driven by settlers. Citing security concerns, Israeli security forces carried out 58 incursions into West Bank towns and villages, and 112 Palestinians were arrested. Forty-one Palestinians and seven Israelis were injured during the reporting period. On 7 April, Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons and detention centres held the first in a planned series of coordinated one-day hunger strikes in protest at the conditions of detention.

In Jerusalem, Palestinian Christian access to Easter celebrations was limited due to an extraordinary closure of checkpoints between the West Bank and East Jerusalem, which lasted from 25 March to 6 April. On 28 March, a protest by Christians in Bethlehem against Israeli access restrictions resulted in the detention of 11 Palestinians, including Fatah Central Committee member Abbas Zaki. There were also instances of restricted access to Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount for Muslim prayer. Demonstrations against the route of the barrier continued, in particular where it is constructed inside the West Bank, in contravention of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. An increasing number of senior Palestinian officials have joined the call for peaceful popular protest against Israeli occupation.

We note with concern that a street in the Ramallah district has been named after a Palestinian militant responsible for the murder of a number of Israeli civilians. We would like to remind all concerned that, under the Road Map, the Palestinian Authority has the obligation to end incitement.

The Palestinian Authority continues to exert efforts to meet its obligations to maintain law and order

and combat terrorism in areas under Palestinian control in the West Bank. There has been continued security cooperation with Israel during this reporting period.

In a worrisome development, an Israeli military order that gives the military commander the power to evict a broad category of individuals whom the Israeli authorities deem not to be residents of the West Bank went into effect yesterday, 13 April. This could have the effect of enabling Israeli authorities to deport these individuals and has provoked strong Palestinian and Arab reaction. Special Coordinator Robert Serry raised the issue with Israeli authorities, and his Office will continue to monitor this development closely.

Palestinian municipal elections planned for 17 July will be an important democratic element of the State-building agenda. The Central Elections Commission has now completed the registration of over 200,000 new voters in the West Bank. The nomination of candidates is scheduled to take place from 1 to 10 June, and campaigning will be between 3 and 15 July. Hamas has not allowed voter registration to take place in Gaza and has called for a boycott of the poll. We reiterate our call on Hamas to allow Gazans to exercise their right to participate in elections. We call on parties to ensure that the elections are free, fair and transparent.

Turning to the important Palestinian State-building agenda and United Nations and international community support for those efforts, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians (AHLC) met in Madrid at senior official level on 13 April. The meeting was chaired by Norwegian Foreign Minister Støre and was hosted by Spanish Foreign Minister Moratinos Cuyaubé. The AHLC was also joined by Quartet Representative Blair, and the United Nations was represented by Special Coordinator Serry. The AHLC discussed measures necessary to support the Palestinian Authority's budget and institution-building as part of the State-building agenda aimed at attaining Prime Minister Fayyad's goal of readiness for statehood in 2011.

The AHLC reconfirmed its support to the Palestinian Authority State-building agenda. During the meeting, Prime Minister Fayyad said that the Palestinian Authority was approaching "the home stretch" in the implementation of its programme and expressed confidence that the remaining tasks of the programme can be implemented over the period June 2010 to June 2011.

The Palestinian Authority requires an estimated $100 million a month in external financing for recurrent budgetary expenditures, but since January, only an estimated $174 million has been transferred. Projected shortfalls in the Palestinian Authority's budget could undermine its reform and State-building agenda. Member States are encouraged to commit funds they pledged, wherever possible through direct support to the Palestinian Authority. We take positive note that the Palestinian Authority has requested budget support of $1.2 billion in 2010, down from $1.35 billion in 2009 and from $1.8 billion in 2008, thus reflecting what Prime Minister Fayyad termed an effort to secure a reduced reliance on the international community.

The 2010 draft budget projects expenditures at $3.9 billion, of which half will be allocated to Gaza. Reflecting positive Palestinian Authority reforms, the Palestinian Central Bureau for Statistics reported that real gross domestic product increased by an estimated 6.8 per cent in 2009 as compared to 2008. However, it is of concern that this figure is driven by the growth in the West Bank, whilst the Gazan economy continues to stagnate. The United Nations has aligned its programming in support of the State-building agenda and intends to focus its efforts in critical areas, including Area C, East Jerusalem and Gaza.

Let me turn to progress that is now being made on entry of materials for a number of approved United Nations projects since the Secretary-General's visit to Gaza on 21 March. As a result of Israeli approval of the entry of aggregate and cement, work has now began on the sewage pumping station project at Tel el-Sultan, and work on the other approved projects, including the 151-unit Khan Younis housing project, is expected to commence shortly. The commercial import of wood and aluminium has been approved and will be allowed entry this week. There have also been other positive measures carried out by Israel, such as the continued exports of cut flowers during the reporting period and an increase in the amount and type of goods entering the Strip, including clothing, shoes and further imports of glass. However, the entry of materials still falls far short of what is required to address the immense reconstruction and development needs of Gaza.

The approved United Nations housing, water and sanitation projects are a modest start of what needs to be done in Gaza. More than half of the population is under the age of 18, and it is their future that should concern us most. More schools need to be built in Gaza to ensure that Palestinian children receive an education that broadens their horizons and prepares them for a better future. The quality of health care is also declining, due in part to the lack in building materials, equipment and supplies necessary for health facilities. In all these critical areas the United Nations will continue to exert its utmost efforts to expedite the entry of needed materials and to expand the scope of activities in Gaza to address these needs. In order to enable these goals and United Nations projects in both Gaza and the West Bank, the United Nations and the Palestinian Authority have agreed that a trust fund will be established at an appropriate time. I would encourage all donors to consider supporting the work of the United Nations through that mechanism.

Beyond the entry of materials into Gaza, other key elements of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) remain unfulfilled and continue to contribute to the instability in the Strip. In particular, the resolution's calls for the commitment of the parties to a durable and sustainable ceasefire and intra-Palestinian reconciliation are yet to be implemented. Without renewed and determined efforts to implement resolution 1860 (2009) in all of its aspects, the situation in Gaza cannot be fully addressed. A more comprehensive and strategic approach to Gaza is urgently required.

It is of serious concern that the security situation in Gaza is again volatile. On 26 March, a clash near Khan Younis led to the deaths of two Israeli soldiers and three Palestinian militants. The military wing of Hamas, the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade and a group called Palestine Taliban, all claimed responsibility for the action. In another incident on 13 April, two Palestinian militants belonging to Islamic Jihad were killed by Israeli security forces, reportedly while trying to place improvised explosive devices near the Gaza-Israel border.

During this period, a total of 35 rockets and mortars were fired from Gaza, and 16 reached southern Israel, with no damage or injuries reported. One Palestinian civilian was killed and 15 others were injured in the course of 14 incursions and six air strikes by Israeli security forces. There are reports that Hamas is trying to prevent further outbreaks of violence, and the major factions in Gaza have agreed with Hamas that they will maintain calm. However rockets continue to be fired from the Strip. We condemn the rocket fire and call for calm to be respected and for international humanitarian law to be upheld.

Egypt is continuing its efforts to combat smuggling, and on 31 March uncovered a significant cache of missiles and shells in northern Sinai, which were reported to be destined for the Gaza Strip. Smuggling of all goods, including arms, continues through tunnels into Gaza and one Palestinian died and six were injured in tunnel collapses during this reporting period. It is vital that all legitimate crossings for imports and exports be opened, as envisaged in the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access, in accordance with resolution 1860 (2009). There has been no progress in efforts to secure the release of Corporal Shalit in exchange for Palestinian prisoners.

The Arab League summit stressed the importance of Palestinian unity; however, there has been no further progress in finalizing an agreement based on the Egyptian proposal. We reiterate the Quartet's call for the promotion of Palestinian unity based on the commitments of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the reunification of Gaza and the West Bank under the legitimate Palestinian Authority.

On 29 March, Hamas took over the bank assets of a benevolent society in Gaza. Such measures jeopardize the whole banking sector and aggravate the humanitarian situation. There are also reports of increasing human rights abuses. We are concerned at public statements by Hamas authority figures indicating the intention to carry out executions of prisoners.

At the League of Arab States summit, the Secretary-General held a bilateral meeting with Syrian President Al-Assad to discuss a range of regional issues. The United Nations continues to support all efforts to revive the Israeli-Syrian track and a broader resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, as envisaged in Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. In the occupied Syrian Golan, settlement activity continued, including the approval of 100 new housing units in the settlement of Nimrod. However, the situation there remained calm.

In Lebanon, on 9 March, President Sleiman reconvened the Committee of National Dialogue for

the first time since the parliamentary elections of last June. In its new configuration, the national dialogue now has a total of 20 participants. Participants agreed to hold the next meeting of the Committee of National Dialogue on 15 April.

On 30 March the Minister of Interior, Ziad Baroud, announced that municipal elections will take place on schedule on four consecutive Sundays in the month of May. In the meantime, Parliament is still pursuing its consideration of the draft law for municipal elections that was submitted to it by the Government.

On the security front, a few unrelated incidents took place in various parts of the country during the reporting period. The most significant was an exchange of fire amongst Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC) military personnel, which took place on 8 April at the Kussaya PFLP-GC military base near the border with Syria, resulting in one person killed and at least two injured. Four individuals were later turned in to the Lebanese Armed Forces.

Continued support by the international community for the reconstruction of the Nahr al-Barid refugee camp remains a priority. Additional funding is urgently required if progress achieved so far in the reconstruction of the camp is to be sustained.

The situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) remained generally quiet in the period under review. Violations of Lebanese airspace have continued on an almost daily basis, mainly using unmanned aerial vehicles but also occasionally involving fighter planes.

The Secretary-General's report to the Security Council on the implementation of its resolution 1559 (2004) will be issued in the coming week.

The Secretary-General has made clear the United Nations commitment to the goal of a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. As he outlined last month to the Council, for that to be achieved, there is no alternative to the urgent resumption of negotiations on all core issues for a two-State solution. This must be enabled by positive developments on the ground. Peace is in the hands of the parties themselves, but the international community must continue to play a crucial role.

The situation is critical. We cannot afford to lose this opportunity to reach an agreement that will end the occupation that began in 1967 and that will result in the emergence of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbours in accordance with Security Council resolutions, previous agreements, the road map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The President: I thank Mr. Pascoe for his very comprehensive briefing this morning.

In accordance with the understanding reached among Council members, I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statement to no more than five minutes to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the full text of their statement in writing and deliver a condensed version in this Chamber.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): I warmly congratulate you, Mr. President, and your friendly country Japan on your presidency of the Security Council. We also express appreciation to the friendly country of Gabon for its skilled guidance of the Council's extensive agenda in March. I also thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his comprehensive briefing today.

I would like to extend the condolences of my delegation to the people and Government of China for the victims of the earthquake that occurred today.

Since the Council's last open debate in January, the situation on the ground in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, has regrettably deteriorated owing to continuing Israeli acts of aggression, colonization, provocation and incitement against the Palestinian people and their land. International and regional efforts to revive the peace process and the continued extension of the Palestinian leadership's hand in peace have only been responded to by Israel with intransigence and defiance. To this moment, Israel persists with its illegal policies, undermining those peace efforts, stoking tensions on the ground and inflaming religious sensitivities in the region and beyond.

In just the short period since that previous debate, we have conveyed 12 letters to the Council, drawing

attention to the series of illegal actions that continue to be perpetrated by the occupying Power and the consequent negative impact on the ground, including the following: the continuing Israeli colonization of occupied Palestinian territory, particularly in and around East Jerusalem, including plans for the construction of thousands of new settlement units; continuing confiscation of Palestinian property, demolition of homes and transfer of settlers, including in the Shu'fat, Al Bustan, Al Abbasiya and Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhoods of East Jerusalem, and continuing settler acts of terror against Palestinian civilians and their property; the targeting of Palestinian, international peace activists and non-violent demonstrators, including by use of excessive, indiscriminate force; the provocative Israeli declaration laying national claim to historic religious sites in the occupied Palestinian territory in Al-Khalil and Bethlehem; the storming of the Haram al-Sharif compound by the Israeli occupying forces, the targeting of Palestinian Muslim worshippers and the restriction of access to holy sites in the Old City; repeated inflammatory statements and incitement by Israeli officials, including Prime Minister Netanyahu, particularly regarding East Jerusalem; violent military raids by the occupying forces and the killing of civilians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the consequent heightened tensions and widespread unrest; the ongoing traumatic impact of the illegal Israeli blockade of Gaza on the humanitarian situation, social and economic conditions and the dignity of the Palestinian people; the arrest and detention of Palestinian officials and Christian community leaders engaged in non-violent protest against restrictions on worshippers during the Easter holiday and against other oppressive Israeli practices; the closure of the West Bank and continued obstruction of the freedom of movement; the desecration of the Ma'man Allah cemetery in Jerusalem; and the recent Israeli orders threatening the deportation of thousands and, I must add, tens of thousands of Palestinian civilians.

This is just a synopsis of the extremely distressful situation faced by the Palestinian people and their leadership at the present time — a situation marked by the blatant intensification of illegal Israeli settlement activities and human rights violations against the Palestinian civilian population. All of this coincides — and, it appears, not incidentally — with the intensification of international efforts led by the United States of America, with the active engagement of the other Quartet members — the European Union, Russian Federation and United Nations — and by the League of Arab States, aimed at resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict via the two-State solution for peace. Those collective efforts are constantly being undercut by the occupying Power's illegal actions, wilfully perpetrated and totally contradictory to a peaceful settlement on the basis of the two-State solution.

The pattern is clear. It is one in which Israel continues to act with flagrant impunity, sabotaging peace initiatives and causing further suffering to the Palestinian people under its occupation. In word and deed, it is apparent that Israel is bent on breaching the Fourth Geneva Convention and creating facts on the ground that illegally and artificially alter in its favour the demographic composition, character and status of the occupied Palestinian territory, especially in and around East Jerusalem — facts on the ground that impair all aspects of Palestinian life, imposing constant humiliation and hardship on the civilian population, whether in the West Bank or the Gaza Strip.

All of the occupying Power's illegal policies call into question its credibility as a peace partner, its commitment to the two-State solution and its standing as a member of this Organization, to which it owes its very existence. Rather than reciprocate the efforts and gestures made for peace — from the explicit commitment to peace and the two-State solution based on the pre-1967 borders made by the Palestinian leadership, beginning with the Palestinian Declaration of Independence over 20 years ago; to the Madrid, Oslo, Taba, Sharm el-Sheikh and Annapolis commitments; the Arab Peace Initiative over eight years ago; the road map to Mideast peace and the Quartet Statement; the diplomatic efforts of the United States of America and all other concerned nations — Israel continues to pay only lip-service to the pursuit of peace, while its actions are actually destroying any chance for the realization of peace.

In this regard, after a long freeze in the peace process and despite severe reservations owing to Israel's continued illegal policies, particularly its settlement activities, the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization agreed to proximity talks mediated by the United States. However, within days of this announcement, the Israeli Government announced its approval of the construction of yet another 1,600 new settlement units in occupied East

Jerusalem, which was preceded by the approval of another 112 settlement units in Bethlehem and followed, despite broad condemnation, by the revelation of plans for another 20 illegal settlement units near the Shepherd Hotel in East Jerusalem. Such flouting of the law and the international demands for a settlement freeze can only lead to the conclusion that the current Israeli Government has no interest in defusing rising tensions and is in fact set on derailing peace efforts.

In addition, Israel recently declared the villages of Bil'in and Ni'lin in the West Bank, which have been the sites of weekly non-violent demonstrations against the Wall and the settlements and have been closed military zones for six months. The occupying forces have repeatedly responded with force to those protests and have carried out arrests of Palestinian peace activists, adding to the thousands of Palestinians already being illegally held in Israeli prisons, as well as arrests of international activists there, clearly aimed at crushing any attempts at peaceful, non-violent protest and at denying Palestinians their human and political rights to freedom of expression and to protest the occupation policies.

Moreover, recent Israeli raids in the West Bank constitute another ill-willed attempt to undermine the Palestinian Authority and its serious security efforts in the cities, towns and villages under its control, efforts that have been recognized by the international community. And, most recently, new Israeli military orders have been revealed by which the occupying Power seeks to further advance its ethnic cleansing campaign, threatening the deportation of tens of thousands of Palestinians from the West Bank, and particularly from East Jerusalem, in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention, human rights law and relevant Security Council resolutions.

At the same time, Israel continues its illegal blockade of the Gaza Strip. On 12 March, Palestinians solemnly marked the thousandth day of the blockade, under which more than 1.5 million Palestinian civilians — some 70 per cent of whom are refugees and over 50 per cent of whom are children — have endured the merciless effects of a hermetically sealed border and total isolation from the rest of the Palestinian territory and the outside world. The magnitude of the humanitarian and psychological suffering and despair and the undoing of development deliberately inflicted by this criminal Israeli collective punishment of the Palestinian people in Gaza cannot be overemphasized. Here, we wish to thank the Secretary-General for his recent visit to Gaza and his firm calls, along with the calls of many other world leaders, on Israel to end the blockade, to allow for Gaza's reconstruction and to allow the healing of the population. Upholding the rule of law, including respect for Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), and our collective conscience demand immediate redress of this unjust, inhumane situation.

On the other hand, and despite such flagrant violations, the Palestinian leadership has continuously, responsibly affirmed its commitment to peace in word and deed. The Arab countries have also consistently done so, based on the understanding of the need for a comprehensive resolution of this conflict and for regional and international peace and stability, as reflected by the Arab ministerial follow-up committee's agreement to give an opportunity to proximity talks and the lack of objections at the Arab Summit in Libya, despite great reluctance owing to Israel's ongoing defiance. Yet Israel made it impossible for the Palestinian side to enter such talks as it continued to dig in its heels and declare its illegal settlement intentions, especially in East Jerusalem. We understand that the United States Administration has requested clarification from the Israeli Government in this regard, but as of now it appears that such clarification has yet to be received.

Although we have repeatedly affirmed our position, we reiterate today that we can not proceed with negotiations, including proximity talks, as long as Israel continues to violate international law, United Nations resolutions and Quartet positions regarding the settlements. Israeli settlement activities, including so-called natural growth, and all other illegal attempts to alter the character, status and demography of the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, must cease immediately to allow for the resumption of a credible, meaningful peace process.

What we have witnessed in these last months is a reaffirmation of Israel's impunity. Persisting with its repeated ruses, empty pretexts and arrogant declarations, Israel refuses to acknowledge that it cannot reconcile its expansionist agenda and its oppression of another people with the most basic tenets of international law that govern our international system. And it cannot reconcile its criminal behaviour with a changing international climate that is now

demanding in very clear terms a cessation of the human rights abuses and grave breaches that have severely compounded this conflict, thwarted all efforts to resolve it, and undermined regional and global peace and security. It is time for the international community to act decisively, guided by the rules and principles of international law and justice, in order to finally bring an end to the Israeli occupation and enable the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination and freedom in their independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel in peace and security on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, and to achieve a just resolution of the plight of the Palestine refugees in accordance with international law and United Nations resolutions, with the full knowledge that both elements are requisite for the realization of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace.

The Security Council, in particular, must assume its role — a role seriously marginalized in this conflict — and must take practical measures to compel Israel to cease all of its illegal settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and finally commit to the pursuit of peace. Moreover, it is essential for the Council, at the appropriate time, to adopt a resolution framing the parameters of the solution to this conflict — a solution that does not need to be reinvented but rather originates from clear, established principles based on international law, United Nations resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, including the principle of Land for Peace, the Arab Peace Initiative, the road map to Mideast peace, and most recently the conclusions of the Council of the European Union on the Middle East Peace Process of 8 December 2009 and the firm position underscored by the Quartet in Moscow on 19 March 2010, including, inter alia, the goal of achieving a peaceful settlement within 24 months.

The international consensus in this regard is clear and must be pursued without delay. We cannot allow Israel to continue to act above the law, defy the calls to end its violations from all corners of the globe, including by its closest allies, and make a mockery of the urgency of achieving peace and security for our region and the international community as a whole. Israel has put us in this situation too many times before and we have witnessed the disastrous consequences. For this reason, the international community must no longer judge Israel on what it says, but rather by the actions it takes, and hold it fully responsible, should it sabotage the opportunity before us to secure peace once and for all.

The President: I thank the Permanent Observer of Palestine for the kind words he addressed to the presidency.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Representative of Israel.

Ms. Shalev (Israel): Let me thank you, Mr. President, for your stewardship of the Security Council. I would also like to thank Mr. Pascoe for his comprehensive briefing.

At the outset, I wish to express the deepest sympathy of the people and the Government of Israel regarding the recent tragedy in which the Polish President and the members of his delegation lost their lives in a plane crash. May the nation of Poland know no more bereavement.

This debate occurs between two important days in Israel. On Monday, Yom Ha'Shoah, we commemorated the Jewish victims of the Holocaust. And next Monday, Yom Ha'Zikaron, we will commemorate our soldiers who have fallen in war and all Israelis murdered by terrorism. Only after these two remembrance days can we put our hearts into celebrating our Day of Independence. These two days of remembrance shed light on our people's unending struggle to build a homeland for the Jewish people, a free, independent and democratic State. Such solemn days signal our desire to live in peace, prosperity and cooperation with our neighbours.

Yet in the pursuit of peace in the Middle East, all parties must realize that they have not only rights, but obligations as well. The Palestinians and the wider Arab world must show, in both word and deed, that they too are committed to the peace process. They should demonstrate their will not only to demand rights but also to accept responsibilities. They must take tangible steps to combat terrorism, to put an end to incitement, to engage in direct negotiations and to begin a process of normalization with Israel.

Israel is hopeful that the proximity talks will serve as a stepping stone towards the resumption of direct, bilateral peace negotiations. Only through such negotiations can we hope to reach a comprehensive peace agreement. Yet the success of such talks — and

their transition into direct negotiations — depends upon all in the region taking confidence-building steps.

The Hamas terrorist rulers of the Gaza Strip maintain Gaza as an epicentre of terrorism. With support, financing and arms from Iran, Hamas brutalizes its own people while launching deadly attacks against Israeli civilians. On 1 April, across the Egyptian-Gaza border in Sinai, a massive quantity of weapons destined for Gaza was uncovered. Throughout February and March, a wave of Qassam rockets and other terrorist attacks exposed the civilian population of southern Israel to serious threats and imminent danger. As a result of these attacks, one agricultural worker in Israel was killed, while dozens of civilians were injured. Only yesterday, the Israel Defense Forces discovered terrorists planting explosive devices along the Israel-Gaza border.

Given this reality, Israel will exercise its right of self-defence, pursuant to international law. Israel will never fail to fulfil its obligation to protect the people of Israel. Israel appreciates the efforts of the international community for the support of humanitarian work in Gaza. We maintain close coordination with the Secretary-General and relevant United Nations bodies for the supply of humanitarian aid to Gaza. In 2009 alone, 738,576 tons of humanitarian commodities were transferred to the Gaza Strip and more than 100 million litres of diesel were delivered to the Gaza power station; 10,544 Gazan patients and their companions received medical treatment in Israel. These numbers reflect only part of the humanitarian aid provided to the people of Gaza. Yet Israel is still a convenient scapegoat for the situation in Gaza. However, the truth remains self-evident.

The complicated situation in Gaza is a direct result of the Hamas terrorist occupation. The complicated situation in Gaza is a direct result of Hamas's continued rejection of the obligations laid out by the international community, namely: recognize Israel, renounce violence and accept previous agreements. The complicated situation in Gaza is also a result of Hamas's ongoing imprisonment of Gilad Shalit who is denied his human rights, including access to international humanitarian personnel.

Beyond Gaza, the West Bank offers an alternative future. As a direct result of Israeli-Palestinian economic and security cooperation, life for Palestinians and Israelis continues to improve. However, obstacles remain. Violence and terrorism are ever-present challenges. Israel is deeply dismayed to see a street in Ramallah named in honour of Yehiye Ayash, a Hamas terrorist-mastermind responsible for the murder of hundreds of innocent Israeli civilians: men, women and children. In another disturbing event, a town square adjacent to Ramallah was renamed in honour of Dalal Mughrabi, a leader in one of the bloodiest terrorist attacks against Israel, the Coastal Road massacre, in which 38 Israeli and American civilians were murdered. Given that the Road Map for Peace explicitly states that all official Palestinian institutions must end incitement against Israel, what message does the Palestinian Authority send by publicly honouring terrorists?

At this point, I would like to respond briefly to concerns that have been expressed regarding recent measures relating to the prevention of the illegal infiltration of individuals into the West Bank. These concerns reflect a misunderstanding of the effect and purpose of those measures. In fact, such measures provide significant safeguards and due process protection for existing legislation; they do not extend beyond it. Let me be clear: these measures apply only to unlawful infiltrators in the West Bank and do not apply to other residents of the area.

Let me turn to the greatest danger facing the Middle East and the world: Iran. Iran continues to threaten to wipe Israel off the map of the world while denying the Holocaust and reigniting anti-Semitism. At the same time Iran supports terrorism and violence against Israel and Jews far beyond the Gaza Strip. In Lebanon, the Hizbullah terrorist organization continues to amass arms from Syria and from its Iranian patrons, with the active consent and support of Syrian authorities. Recently, Syria supplied Hizbullah with long-range missiles in an overt violation of resolution 1701 (2006). By doing so, Syria actively threatens the fragile stability in the Middle East.

Yet the most alarming danger is that Iran continues to pursue nuclear weapons capabilities, while mocking the diplomatic overtures of the international community. Such behaviour endangers not only our region, not merely a specific group of countries: it endangers us all, and this is recognized by all. The Council therefore has an obligation to translate this consensus into timely and effective action. To use the words of a great poet, "If it were done when 'tis done,

then 'twere well it were done quickly" (*Shakespeare*, Macbeth, *Act I, scene 7*).

The Iranian threat, the menace of terrorism, the transfer of weapons to terrorist groups, the incitement and hatred taught to Arab children: these are the true dangers facing the situation in the Middle East and the question of Palestine. All in the region have a right to live without threats, and all in the region have the responsibility to confront these dangers. If those in our region recognize the relationship between rights and responsibilities, we will then be standing at the threshold of a new era for peace in the Middle East.

The President: I shall now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Mr. Salam (Lebanon): I welcome the presence of Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Pascoe and thank him for his briefing.

At the outset, allow me to convey to the Chinese people, through the Permanent Mission of China, the sympathy of the Lebanese people in connection with this morning's tragic earthquake.

There has never been greater international consensus on the parameters of Arab-Israeli peace. Yet, Israel is more than ever intentionally taking unilateral illegal actions aimed at predetermining the outcome of negotiations, changing the reality on the ground and rendering the two-State solution almost impossible. The Israeli Government persistently disrupts the peace efforts of the American Administration, including by expanding settlements, in particular in East Jerusalem. That is in addition to the ongoing settlement activity in the West Bank under the pretext of so-called natural growth, despite the Government's claims that it would stop settlement activities there for 10 months.

On 3 March, Arab States reiterated their support for American peace efforts. United States Middle East Envoy Senator George Mitchell has announced an agreement on proximity talks. Yet, on 9 March, during a visit to bid for peace by American Vice President Joe Biden, Israeli authorities adopted a plan to add 1,600 settlement units in East Jerusalem. Words of condemnation came from all the over the world, including from the Secretary-General, the American Administration, the Quartet and many others. However, the Israeli Government cracked down on peaceful Palestinian civilian demonstrations in the West Bank and allowed criminal behaviour by its settlers, which resulted in the deaths of four Palestinians. Moreover, on 21 March, the Israeli Prime Minister declared that "settlement activity in Jerusalem will not stop" and than it was "like building in Tel Aviv".

Even as the American President was receiving Mr. Netanyahu in Washington, D.C. on 23 March to discuss ways to move the peace process forward, Israeli authorities confirmed another illegal East Jerusalem project for 20 residential units in the Shepherd Hotel compound in a neighbourhood populated mostly by Palestinians. The Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* was told by Israeli planning officials on 11 March that some 50,000 new settlement housing units in Jerusalem neighbourhoods outside the Green Line were at various stages of development and approval. The officials added that Jerusalem's construction plans for the coming decades were expected to focus on East Jerusalem, and that plans for some 20,000 apartments were already at advanced stages of implementation.

Israeli designs target not only occupied Palestinian land in the West Bank, but also Palestinians themselves. In a bid to open the door to what could be a new wave of ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from their homelands, a new Israeli military order came into force this week. Under that new order, tens of thousands of Palestinians deemed "infiltrators" will automatically become criminal offenders liable to expulsion. Palestinians most likely to be targeted under the new rules are those whose identification cards bear home addresses in the Gaza Strip. But the term "infiltrator" could also apply to Palestinian residents of Jerusalem. What is most ironic is that the infiltrator category could also apply to previously displaced or refugee Palestinians who have been able to return to their own towns and villages in the West Bank.

Allow me also to draw the Council's attention to the suffering of children as a result of Israeli practices. The Israeli human rights group B'Tselem told the Associated Press on 9 March that Israeli police were improperly arresting Palestinian boys during night-time raids in Jerusalem. In affidavits to B'Tselem, six boys aged between 12 and 14 described arrest raids involving around a dozen heavily armed military police, who surrounded their homes, handcuffed them and led them to cells, where they were slapped, kicked and told by interrogators to confess if they wanted to go home. One of the boys, 12-year-old Ahmad, said in an affidavit, "I was made to kneel and face the wall,

and every time I moved, a man slapped me across the neck".

Let us also not forget the plight of the more than 10,000 Palestinians in Israeli prisons and detention centres, most of whom are civilians. In our continuing efforts to put names to the faces of some of those not-to-be-forgotten Palestinians in order to recall their suffering and perhaps help to put an end to their captivity, I would today like to mention the name of Nafez Haraz, a 54-year-old Palestinian from Gaza who has been in captivity for 24 years and who has been prevented from seeing some of his children for the past five years. In that regard, I would like to recall that thousands of those prisoners carried out a hunger strike on 7 April to protest the bad treatment they receive from the occupying authorities. Similar hunger strikes are planned for the seventeenth and twenty-seventh of this month.

In Gaza, we are into the second 1,000 days of the Israeli blockade. In late February, the Foreign Minister of Ireland — the first such European Union official to visit Gaza in more than a year — described the blockade as a "medieval siege" and concluded that

> "the tragedy of Gaza is that it is fast in danger of becoming a tolerated humanitarian crisis, a situation that most right-thinking people recognize as utterly unacceptable in this day".

The Israeli blockade is illegal and immoral. Its disastrous effects on civilians in Gaza are reprehensible. The blockade must end now, as must the indiscriminate Israeli aerial bombing of Gaza, which continues to cause death and destruction.

We believe that the Security Council should closely monitor developments pertaining to the report of the Fact-Finding Mission into the deadly war on Gaza that Israel launched at the end of 2008 (A/HRC/12/48), which is also known as the Goldstone report. In particular, we hope it will do so, because we trust that no Council member would ever tolerate impunity. In that regard, we welcome the 25 March decision by the Human Rights Council that called for independent and credible investigations into the serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law reported by the Fact-Finding Mission and for the establishment of a committee of independent experts to monitor the independence, effectiveness and genuineness of the investigations and their conformity with international standards.

We believe that any future negotiations, under whatever format, must concentrate on final status issues — specifically on borders, including in Jerusalem — in short, specified timeframes, and not just focus on confidence-building measures. We further believe that a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the Middle East conflict should be based on resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the Madrid terms of reference, the principle of land for peace, and the Arab Peace Initiative. In this regard, we welcome the affirmation by the Secretary-General and that of the Quartet on 19 March that peace talks should lead in two years to the establishment of an independent Palestinian State — that is, by March 2012.

We also reaffirm that all measures and actions taken by Israel to alter the legal and demographic status of the territories it has occupied since 1967, including the Syrian Golan, are null and void and have no legal effect whatsoever, as per numerous resolutions adopted by this Council.

As for the situation in Lebanon, we reaffirm our commitment to resolution 1701 (2006) in its entirety and renew our pledge to work closely with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon.

Mr. Apakan (Turkey): First of all, let me join my colleagues in extending our condolences to China after today's deadly earthquake.

I wish to thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his briefing. We fully support the Under-Secretary-General's efforts. His recent visit to Israel and Palestine was important in terms of highlighting the current issues. As Mr. Pascoe stated, efforts to put the peace process back on track are still under way. The Quartet statement of 19 March deserves our full attention and outlines what should be done in the period ahead. We look forward to the actual start of the proximity talks and continue to support United States efforts towards this end. The talks should start as soon as possible, since the absence of a functioning peace process is leading to an increasingly precarious environment in the region.

The negotiations should lead to a comprehensive peace based on two States, agreed borders based on those of 1967, Jerusalem as the capital for both States, and a just settlement for refugees. Relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative provide the required

basis for such an end result. We hope that this time there will be a chance for peace along these basic lines.

The climate in the region will inevitably have a direct impact on the success of the talks. Attempting to change the facts on the ground in order to prejudice the outcome of the negotiations would yield no result, but would undermine trust. Therefore, we believe that Israel must fully and permanently stop its illegal settlement activities in the occupied territories and refrain from any unilateral or provocative action, particularly in East Jerusalem.

Jerusalem is a deeply important issue, not only for Israelis and Palestinians, but also for Muslims, Jews and Christians throughout the world. Any attempt to change the fabric and status of Jerusalem or to take steps to perpetuate the occupation in defiance of the relevant Security Council resolutions would pose a serious threat to stability and peace.

The historical and universal heritage of Jerusalem, which we are bound to protect and preserve, represents in itself the values of unity, peace and harmony. Therefore, instead of being pushed to the centre of the Middle East conflict, the issue of Jerusalem should be the inspiration leading the way towards lasting settlement and cooperation.

The military escalation in the West Bank is also a cause for serious concern and places the progress made by the Palestinian Authority in State-building in jeopardy. At this stage, the focus should be on empowering the Palestinian Authority. Palestinians should be able to use more of their land and to enjoy their fundamental rights. However, restrictions continue to delay Palestinian economic and social development. In particular, the new military order enabling the occupying forces to detain, imprison and deport Palestinians from the West Bank cannot contribute to Palestinian State-building and mutual trust, let alone lasting peace in the region. We call on Israel to revise these policies, which contradict the relevant Security Council decisions.

Disunity on the Palestinian side also continues to be of major concern. It not only hinders the maintenance of a functional socio-political system in Palestine, but impedes the resumption of the peace process. We will continue to urge the Palestinian factions to resolve their differences.

Despite certain steps by the Israeli side, the situation in Gaza remains mostly unchanged. The siege continues, with Palestinians inside continuing to suffer without proper housing, education, infrastructure, job opportunities or health services. The situation is neither acceptable nor sustainable. The recent escalation along the borders of Gaza showed once again that, so long as the wounds of this humanitarian tragedy are left open, there can be no mutual confidence or sense of stability in the area. The full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009) holds the key to security and stability in the region. A return to normal life in Gaza and the onset of reconstruction and regular economic activity would have a very positive impact on the overall climate in the region.

We agree with the Secretary-General that there is no alternative to negotiations for a comprehensive and just settlement, and no alternative to addressing all of the core issues necessary to a two-State solution. At this critical stage, there is also no alternative but to focus on the political process, build trust, renounce violence and push forward with determination and good will for a comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Barbalić (Bosnia and Herzegovina): At the outset, let me join others in expressing our deepest grief to the representative and the friendly people of China with regard to the tragic earthquake this morning.

I would like to thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his update on recent developments in the Middle East. We also thank the Permanent Representative of Israel, Ms. Gabriela Shalev, and the Permanent Observer of Palestine, Mr. Riyad Mansour, for their presence and contribution to our debate.

Allow me to point out that the delegation of Bosnia and Herzegovina aligns itself with the statement of the European Union.

Bosnia and Herzegovina remains deeply concerned over the situation in the Middle East. Recent events have additionally burdened the already fragile situation on the ground. We therefore underscore the need for an immediate resumption of the proximity talks as a prelude to full Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations.

We take this opportunity to underscore once again that lasting peace and security can be achieved only on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Road Map and the agreements previously reached by the parties, as well as the Arab Peace Initiative. Bosnia and Herzegovina remains committed to the two-State solution, with the State of Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable State of Palestine living side by side in peace and security.

In order to achieve this objective, the parties have to meet their obligations and commitments. In that sense, Bosnia and Herzegovina condemns the recent decision of the Government of Israel to approve the building of 1,600 new housing units in East Jerusalem, which came at a time when new hopes for the resumption of proximity talks were on the horizon. We reiterate that all settlement activity on occupied land is illegal under international law and is contrary to Israel's obligations under the Road Map. We call upon Israel to immediately end all settlement activities, including natural growth, dismantle all outposts erected since March 2001 and refrain from demolitions and evictions in East Jerusalem.

Bosnia and Herzegovina does not recognize the annexation of East Jerusalem and stresses that the status of Jerusalem is a permanent status issue that must be resolved through negotiations between the parties. We also wish to stress that the holy ground of the three great monotheistic religions deserves mutual and global respect for peace, freedom of religious expression and human rights.

Bosnia and Herzegovina attaches high importance to the determination of the Quartet to remain actively involved on all tracks and to encourage the pursuit of a comprehensive resolution of the Middle East conflict. At its last meeting, held in Moscow on 19 March, the Quartet underlined that the proximity talks are an important step towards the resumption, without preconditions, of direct, bilateral negotiations that resolve all final status issues, as previously agreed by the parties.

We also appreciate the efforts of the United States Special Envoy, Senator Mitchell, and his tenacity in laying the groundwork for a resumption of negotiations. Furthermore, Bosnia and Herzegovina supports the view that the entire international community must help all the parties to transform the unsustainable status quo into a politically sustainable negotiating process without further delay, with a view to reaching a peace agreement at the earliest possible time.

Bosnia and Herzegovina deeply regrets the lack of any meaningful steps towards reconstruction and rehabilitation in Gaza. We reiterate our call for the urgent and full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009) and for the immediate, sustained and unconditional opening of crossings for the flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons to and from Gaza, in accordance with the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access.

Bosnia and Herzegovina strongly condemns all armed attacks on civilians and wishes to reiterate that the civilian populations must be protected. We join the Quartet in condemning the 18 March rocket fire from Gaza and we urge the Palestinian side to continue to implement its obligations to end violence. We call once more for an immediate end to all violence and terror. We urge all the parties to observe restraint and make every effort to avoid further escalation.

I would like to conclude by emphasizing that meaningful dialogue is the only way forward. Bosnia and Herzegovina urges both the Israelis and the Palestinians to immediately resume peace negotiations as the conditio sine qua non for achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Mayr-Harting (Austria): My delegation, like others, would first like to express its condolences to the People's Republic of China on the natural calamity it has just suffered.

Austria would also like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his update on recent developments in the Middle East. We thank the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their presence here today and for their contributions to our debate.

Austria aligns itself with the statement that will be made by the delegation of the European Union on behalf of the Union.

The renewal of direct negotiations between the parties on all final status issues is both urgent and without alternative. To deliver on the peace and security that Israelis and Palestinians have been yearning for, leaders on both sides need to engage in

good faith and come to a settlement which ends the occupation and implements the two-State solution.

The 24 months stipulated by the Middle East Quartet should be more than sufficient to agree on final terms, provided that there is genuine political will on both sides. Each day without tangible progress undermines the position of those who argue in favour of dialogue and strengthens those who advocate extremism and violence. If there is to be trust in a renewed peace process, both parties must honour the obligations they have agreed to under the Road Map and refrain from any action that may lead to further violence and confrontation.

As for Israel, that requires an effective halt to all settlement activities, including natural growth, and the dismantling of all outposts; the end of the construction of the separation barrier on all occupied land; and an end to evictions and demolitions. In this context, we also wish to express our grave concern about the negative implications of Military Order No. 1650 for residency and freedom of movement of Palestinians in the occupied territories, and we call on Israel to reconsider its implementation.

We also urge Israel to reverse recent decisions to build additional housing units in East Jerusalem. We have taken note of the very clear statement that the Middle East Quartet has made, including in particular on this issue. These illegal and illegitimate policies pre-empt the outcome of final status negotiations and undercut the viability of the two-State solution.

At the same time, we call on the Palestinian Authority to continue to make every effort to improve law and order, to confront violent extremism and to end incitement. We also look to Palestinian leaders to actively discourage any attempts to escalate tensions in East Jerusalem.

The launch of results-oriented negotiations is also essential to Palestinian efforts to build the infrastructure and institutions of a future State that will provide opportunities, justice and security for both its citizens and their Israeli neighbours. Austria, both bilaterally and within the overall efforts of the European Union, will continue to assist Palestinian State-building. However, these efforts can ultimately succeed only with the backup of a clear and time-bound perspective of a handover of administrative and security responsibility and with funding generated by normal economic activity rather than donor dependence. As confirmed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund ahead of yesterday's meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee in Madrid, the acceleration of improvements regarding freedom of movement and access across the West Bank and Gaza is key to sustained economic growth and hence the viability of a future State of Palestine. Austria therefore strongly encourages Israel to decisively remove remaining obstacles and give positive consideration to increasing Palestinian access to land and resources in Area C.

The persistent deprivation of the population of Gaza of basic commodities underscores once again the critical need for full compliance with resolution 1860 (2009). That is also true with regard to the, regrettably, continuing rocket and mortar attacks on southern Israel. In view of the undiminished urgency of reconstruction, Austria has positively noted Israel's decision to facilitate access for construction materials for a limited number of recovery projects, including construction in Khan Younis and the ongoing efforts in water and sewage treatment. We hope that this welcome and overdue step will be followed by a comprehensive positive response to our long-standing demand to de-block all other United Nations recovery projects, and to the international community's unanimous call for the unimpeded flow of humanitarian aid and commercial goods to and from Gaza.

We wish to underline the continued need for thorough and credible investigations of all allegations of grave violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law in relation to the Gaza conflict. There must be accountability and an effective remedy for victims of such violations.

Regarding Lebanon, we welcome the reconvening of the national dialogue by President Sleiman. Ahead of tomorrow's next round, we call on leaders across the political spectrum to advance the development of a national defence strategy. We wish to reiterate that the monopoly of the Lebanese State regarding the legitimate use of force must be respected. All arms in the country must be brought under the sole and unique control of the Government. Immediate and unconditional compliance with the embargo on all transfers of arms outside the authority of the Lebanese State is also essential to achieve the objective of exclusive Government control over all arms.

There is broad consensus in the international community on the urgency of overcoming the ongoing deadlock in the search for a just and lasting regional peace. We wish to underline our continued support for the efforts of the United States in this regard. In the framework of the European Union, Austria will continue actively to look for ways to make a peace deal possible within the next 24 months and stands ready to support concrete steps on the path to comprehensive peace.

Mr. Heller (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I, too, should like to join in condolences to the Government and the people of China for the earthquake that they suffered today.

I thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East, and the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their statements.

Since the Council's most recent consideration of the issue at hand, the situation in the Middle East has continued to deteriorate and tension and violence between the parties have increased. The situation is most worrisome and not conducive to the resumption of dialogue. In these circumstances, the international community, including this Council, should continue to encourage the swift resumption of direct peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority based on agreements and obligations previously reached.

We know that this is the only way to achieve a comprehensive and definitive solution to the conflict in the Middle East that will reaffirm recognition of Israel's right to exist and enable the establishment of a politically and economically viable Palestinian State living side by side with Israel within secure and internationally recognized borders, in accordance with Security Council resolutions, the Road Map, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative. We therefore support the Quartet's declaration of 19 March and welcome the initiative to hold so-called proximity talks so long as they lead to the unconditional resumption of direct negotiations within a reasonable time frame and do not become an exercise in distraction.

In order to establish conditions conducive to dialogue, it is indispensable that Israel and the Palestinian Authority respect the Road Map principles that form the basis for the resolution of all pending issues in this conflict. Similarly, both parties should avoid actions that run counter to international law and international humanitarian law, as well as any provocative statement or act of violence that could lead to an escalation of the conflict.

We reiterate once again that the demolition of homes, evictions and the expansion of settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, including so-called natural growth, constitute violations of international law and represent serious obstacles to the peace process. We urge Israel to cease these practices as soon as possible and to revoke recent measures taken in East Jerusalem so as to open the genuine possibility of resuming negotiations. Such unilateral actions should not prejudge the result of negotiations and will not be recognized by the international community.

We commend the efforts of the Palestinian Authority to meet its commitments in the areas of security and economic development in the West Bank, which have now begun to bear fruit. In that regard, we also note the positive economic and human impact of Israel's initiative to partially lift restrictions on the movement of people and goods in the West Bank. We hope that these measures will be pursued and lead to the full and irreversible dismantling of all checkpoints, which is an indispensable condition for the establishment of a viable and independence Palestinian State.

We are convinced that improvement in the living conditions of the Palestinian people, coupled with effective security control by the Palestinian authorities in the West Bank, are fundamental elements in the achievement of lasting peace in the Middle East. We therefore support the plan of Prime Minister Fayyad to build the economic and institutional bases of the future Palestinian State, and we call on the Quartet and the international community to actively support that effort.

The deterioration of the humanitarian situation and the intensification of violence in Gaza and southern Israel are also sources of serious concern. The blockade of the population of the Gaza Strip has proved to be counterproductive because it perpetuates the illicit trafficking of materials, fuel and food and opens the door to the illicit traffic in weapons, thereby jeopardizing the security of the entire region. Proof of that is the increase in rocket attacks against the civilian population of Israel, which have generated new military reprisals, with tragic consequences. We

condemn such acts of violence and once again urge all actors to respect the provisions of international humanitarian law at all times.

The international community must do its utmost to prevent a new spiral of violence that could lead to armed confrontation. In these tense times, we call for general calm and respect for the provisions of resolution 1860 (2009). We insist once again on the need to establish an international monitoring mechanism to guarantee a lasting ceasefire, the opening of border crossings and the control of illicit weapons trafficking. We also support the initiatives of the Secretary-General with respect to the reconstruction of infrastructure in Gaza, and we welcome Israel's agreement to permit some of these projects to begin and to allow certain essential products to enter Gaza. This is a first step that should lead to the full opening of the crossing points. We also stress the importance of completing as soon as possible the intra-Palestinian reconciliation process, supported by Egypt. It, too, is a fundamental step towards the construction of the future Palestinian State.

Peace in the Middle East also has a regional dimension. We are therefore concerned by the ongoing violations of the provisions of resolution 1701 (2006), in particular the daily incursions of Israeli armed forces into the territory of Lebanon; by the discovery of weapons and explosives in the zone of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon; and by other incidents under investigation. We call on Lebanon, Israel and all other actors involved to honour the provisions of the relevant Security Council resolutions and to refrain from belligerent rhetoric that could lead to an escalation of violence. It is critical to this process that the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of Lebanon be strengthened. We also hope that Israel and Syria will resume their indirect talks, which could help to begin to resolve pending questions and foster confidence and security in both States.

In recent days there have been important initiatives in the area of arms control and nuclear non-proliferation. And we are only a few weeks away from the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. The Middle East must not be an exception in this sphere. Mexico is convinced that the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East should be part of a broad, comprehensive political understanding that guarantees peaceful coexistence among sovereign States in that region, including a future Palestinian State, and that takes account of the legitimate security concerns of all States.

Mr. Araud (France) (*spoke in French*): I wish to extend condolences to the delegation of China on the disaster that has just struck that country.

I thank Mr. Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing, and the Permanent Representative of the State of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their statements.

I wish to raise three points. First, our principal objective today is the urgent relaunch of the peace process. There is no alternative to the resumption of negotiations towards the creation of a viable and contiguous Palestinian State living side by side with Israel in peace and within secure and recognized borders, on the basis of Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. That is also the position of the European Union, as the acting head of the Union's delegation will indicate in his statement, with which France associates itself.

On 19 March, the Quartet set out a two-year deadline for the conclusion of negotiations. But if the parties continue to be incapable of engaging in negotiations of some kind, the international community will have to commit itself to assisting the negotiations in order to guarantee the terms of a final agreement, with a view to emerging from this impasse. To that end, we are working in close cooperation with United States and Egyptian authorities at all levels to define the terms for international assistance making possible the relaunch of the negotiations, something for which we sincerely hope.

Secondly, parallel to efforts to relaunch negotiations, developments on the ground are necessary. Here, I shall touch on two sectors: first, of course, settlement activity and, secondly, Gaza. As to settlement activity, we all know that this remains a major obstacle on the path to a settlement. The Israeli Government's decision to impose a 10-month moratorium on new construction and the issuance of new construction permits in the West Bank are a step in the right direction and should be implemented. There can be no peace without a complete end to construction in the settlements, which are illegal.

As the President of the French Republic has noted, by making the prospect of a Palestinian State more difficult, settlement activity does not contribute to Israel's security. Indeed, it increases the threats. Such threats — in Jerusalem more than anywhere else — are a sensitive matter, and we find developments in the holy city are most alarming. We affirm that all provocative acts must be avoided in so sensitive a city. The European Union has therefore condemned recent Israeli announcements on the construction of new housing in Ramat Shlomo and in Sheikh Jarrah.

Settlement activities in East Jerusalem, such as the demolition of houses and other expulsions, are morally unacceptable and politically dangerous. There can be no peace without Jerusalem, which as the French President said in his statement to the Knesset on 23 June 2008, is to become the capital of two States.

For its part, the Palestinian Authority must continue its efforts to strengthen the security sector, to establish the rule of law and to fight mercilessly against terrorism. Those should remain its priorities.

Another matter on the ground to which we must devote attention is the situation in Gaza. Beyond the humanitarian issues, it would be a political mistake to ignore Gaza. We call for full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009), including the immediate unconditional lifting of the blockade which has affected the territory in the areas of humanitarian assistance and the movement of commercial goods and individuals. At the same time, we call for an end to weapons smuggling into Gaza.

Israel's commitment to easing restrictions on certain United Nations projects following the Secretary-General's visit to Gaza is a step in the right direction. The announced measures must now be implemented and expanded.

The immediate cessation of all violence, especially the firing of rockets into southern Israel, is also necessary. Finally, we call for the immediate release of Gilad Shalit, which is a matter that France has been following with close attention.

Thirdly and finally, the international community must lend strong support to the Palestinian Authority in order to strengthen Palestinian State institutions. Israel, for its part, should work with far greater determination to help in that regard. Steps have been taken on the ground but remain insufficient. Palestinians must be able to see that developments on the ground are in the direction of an end to the occupation, including with respect to movement and access. Here, we reaffirm our full support for the plan of Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, which is in line with the outcome of the 2007 Paris conference, which is intended to lead to the establishment of a Palestinian State in accordance with an agreed timetable.

Let us not forget the other regional tracks of the peace process. We are working to create conditions for the resumption of talks between Syria and Israel.

We are also continuing our efforts with respect to Lebanon, and we welcome the fact that the situation there has remained calm. But we must remain vigilant and continue to urge the parties to fully implement resolution 1701 (2006). Here, there is no lack of matters of concern. In this context, we reaffirm the crucial role played by the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon.

The international community and the Security Council have a major role to play, for the situation in the Middle East is of concern to us all. France is ready to play its full role in this effort, and it was to that end that President Sarkozy put forward the idea of a peace summit to back United States efforts and to complement resumed peace talks, and to be prepared in cooperation with all stakeholders.

Mr. Issoze-Ngondet (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I wish first of all to convey sincere condolences to the Chinese delegation regarding the earthquake that struck China this morning.

I wish also to thank Mr. Pascoe, the Permanent Observer of the Palestinian Authority and the Permanent Representative of Israel for their statements.

We have come together once more to assess the situation in the Middle East in the light of recent events in the region. Since our previous debate, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been the subject of intense diplomatic activity. Meeting in Moscow in March, the international Middle East Quartet called for a settlement freeze and established a two-year timetable for a peace agreement. For their part, Arab League heads of State and other representatives met in Sirte, Libya, on 27 March to consider the situation in the Middle East. They declared that they were favourable to indirect negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians, in line with a proposal made by United

States Special Envoy George Mitchell on his most recent visit to the Middle East in March.

At the highest level, the United States has made efforts to help the two parties to overcome their disagreements and begin negotiations. Vice-President Joseph Biden visited the region, in a rather difficult context, to advance the cause of peace. President Barack Obama received Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Washington, D.C., for talks aimed at a rapid resumption of peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Gabon welcomes all of those diplomatic efforts, which give us some reason for hope, even if the peace process remains at an impasse. Indeed, recent intransigence in the positions of both parties is affecting prospects for the resumption of political dialogue.

Gabon reiterates its position in favour of seeing the two parties re-engage in peace negotiations and urges them to follow the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative and to abstain from acts that could undermine the chances for peace.

In this regard, we fully support the statement made by the Secretary-General on 24 March 2010 on the need to lift the Gaza blockade. The effectiveness of such a decision could contribute to re-establishing a climate of confidence between the two parties, enabling proximity talks to be undertaken once again and re-launching the peace process, which is so vital to the geopolitical and strategic stability of the entire region.

Sir Mark Lyall Grant (United Kingdom): I should like to express the condolences of the British Government to the delegation of China on the loss of life following the devastating earthquake today.

I would also like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his briefing this morning.

Peace in the Middle East remains a key priority for the United Kingdom. As long as a sustainable solution eludes us, the situation in Palestine and Israel will remain a catalyst for resentment, violence and extremism. So it is in the interest of this Council, which is charged with maintaining global peace and security, and of the rest of the international community to encourage a rapid resumption and conclusion of negotiations between the parties, leading to a lasting peace.

The end state is clear — an independent and viable Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbours. This objective is shared by almost all of the international community. There is also broad international convergence on the parameters of a conclusive solution: two States, borders based on those of 1967, Jerusalem as the capital of both States, and a just settlement for refugees.

But whatever the will of the international community and whatever its shared goal and common understanding of the parameters, there can be no peace until the parties themselves take the necessary steps to move the process forward. I would like to make four points on what we believe needs to happen in order to make progress.

First, peace can be achieved only through negotiations. We urge the parties to urgently enter into proximity talks. Both sides should be prepared to use the talks to discuss all core issues. But indirect talks are no substitute for direct negotiations, so the aim must be for proximity talks to rapidly lead to face-to-face negotiations. Setting a clear time frame is key. We therefore welcome the 24-month time frame articulated in the Quartet's 19 March statement.

Secondly, both sides must work harder on creating an atmosphere conducive to peace. That requires them to abide by their previous commitments and to avoid provocation and incitement. Israeli settlement activity in the occupied territories, including in East Jerusalem, is illegal under international law and should stop. Last month's announcement of 16,000 new housing units in the Jerusalem settlement of Ramat Shlomo was not only illegal, but had an immediate negative impact on the prospects for resumed peace talks. We are also concerned by the recent Israeli decision to change the deportation rules for Palestinian nationals living in the West Bank. We urge the Israeli authorities, in accordance with international law, to respect the freedom of Palestinians to live in the West Bank and to move freely within the Palestinian territories.

The Palestinian side must also refrain from incitement. The recent deaths of two Israel Defense Forces soldiers in Gaza — and Israel's response, which resulted in the deaths of at least four Palestinians — were a tragic reminder of the risk of a return to a cycle of violence. It is the responsibility of Hamas, if it

genuinely wants a peaceful and better future for the citizens of Gaza, to ensure an end to all violent attacks emanating from Gaza and to release unconditionally Gilad Shalit, who has been held without Red Cross access for nearly four years. The Palestinian Authority should also avoid any actions that make restarting the negotiations more difficult. In particular, we find any form of commemoration or celebration of individuals who have been responsible for the death of civilians deeply distasteful.

Thirdly, sustainable peace requires a viable Palestinian State represented by a united leadership. We continue to support the Palestinian Authority's two-year State-building plan that will lay the foundation of a future State. This ambitious and impressive effort needs to be reinforced by a unified leadership.

Fourthly, Israel must ensure that its actions do not damage the prospects for a viable Palestinian State under unified leadership. Israel's de facto blockade of Gaza only serves to radicalize and isolate its population, a key stakeholder in any future peace. Furthermore, it is a failed policy. The tunnels are becoming more sophisticated, to the point where there are frequent reports of four-by-four vehicles being smuggled through them. Consequently, it is almost certainly more difficult to monitor and control the flow of illicit weapons into Gaza, and Hamas is profiting, both financially and politically, from the tunnel economy.

We welcome the limited Israeli cooperation with the United Nations Gaza reconstruction initiative and the easing of restrictions on the flow of some goods into Gaza, as outlined by Mr. Pascoe. But it is not sufficient. We urge Israel to open the crossings so Gazans can access the means to meet their needs legitimately.

Finally, the region and the wider international community must play a key role. We fully support the efforts of the United States Administration to bring the parties to the negotiating table. Active Arab engagement and encouragement will also be crucial to creating an atmosphere conducive to peace and securing the desired end state. The region, this Council, the Quartet and the broader international community must send a clear and unambiguous message about our shared vision, the parameters of a solution and our willingness to stand ready to provide practical support, as required, once negotiations get under way. The world is ready and waiting, but it is up to the parties themselves to take the first steps.

Mr. Long Zhou (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's open debate.

(*spoke in English*)

A strong earthquake struck the Yushu region in Qinghai province in China today. The earthquake caused heavy losses in terms of the lives and property of the local people. The central and local Governments have responded rapidly and are making every effort to organize rescue and relief work. I would like to take this opportunity to thank previous speakers for the support and sympathy they expressed for the Chinese people and Government.

(*spoke in Chinese*)

The current situation in the Middle East remains serious. The peace process in the Middle East remains at an impasse. We are seriously concerned and worried about this situation. An early solution to the Middle East question is a shared expectation of the international community. It is also in the common interests of the various parties and critical to regional and international peace and security. The international community should make concerted efforts for the early settlement of the issue. We hope that this meeting will provide new impetus to the Middle East peace process.

It is the consistent view of China that political negotiation remains the only way to solve the problem. We hope that the parties will maintain their faith in peace talks and demonstrate the political will to create favourable conditions for an early resumption of the talks. Israel's declaration that it would build settlements in East Jerusalem and other practices run counter to international efforts and create new obstacles to the resumption of talks. We strongly reject such practices. We urge Israel to respond to international appeals by ceasing construction of its settlements and separation wall in the occupied Palestinian territory.

We are opposed to any act that undermines the basis for such talks and mutual confidence and prejudges the outcome of those talks. We are deeply concerned by the decision of Israel to implement its military order in the West Bank and its possible negative consequences. We call upon Israel to give careful consideration to its own interests and to overall

peace and stability in the region before taking action and to create positive conditions for the resumption of talks. We urge all parties to implement Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) in earnest and to facilitate the lifting of the blockade of the Gaza Strip so that construction can start as soon as possible and people can return to their normal lives and live in dignity.

The realization of intra-Palestinian reconciliation is very important to restarting the Middle East peace process. We hope that all parties will focus on their long-term national interests, consolidate unity and join hands in achieving independent, self-reliant and viable statehood for the Palestinians.

With the return of spring all life awakes anew. We await the early return of spring in the Middle East peace process. We welcomed the declaration of the Quartet last month in Moscow. We hope that all parties, including the Quartet, will take practical measures to facilitate the early resumption of talks. We also hope that the Security Council will play a greater and more effective role in this process.

The Chinese Government supports the legitimate rights and interests of the Palestinian people and their just cause. We support the two-State solution based on the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative and the principle of land for peace. Together with the international community, China will maintain its support for the efforts of the Palestinian people to achieve statehood and for the realization of just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region.

The President: I would like to express the sympathy and condolences of the Security Council to the people and Government of China in this tragic natural disaster.

Mr. Onemola (Nigeria): I, too, would like at the outset to express our condolences to the representative of China for the earthquake that occurred this morning. Our hearts go out to the victims. We also wish to thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing.

We are having this debate once again in the backdrop of escalating tensions between the Israelis and Palestinians. Recent efforts to bring the two parties together in proximity talks were rendered futile because of provocative actions and pronouncements on both sides. It is a matter of regret that, instead of showing genuine commitment to the peace process and providing the requisite confidence-building measures to promote it, the Israelis and Palestinians have continued on a path that undermines peace between them. The situation in Gaza is steadily gathering momentum for a downward spiral into another cycle of widespread violence and destruction. We urge the two parties to sheathe their swords and embrace peace.

As was the case during our last debate, neither party to the conflict can escape blame for actions and pronouncements that are harmful to the peace process. The clashes in Khan Yunis, which resulted in deaths and reprisal strikes, as well as the new Israeli military order that gives the power to detain, imprison and deport Palestinians deemed to be infiltrators in the occupied territory, are illustrative of these inimical actions.

We reiterate our call on Israel and the Palestinians to exercise utmost restraint in their actions and utterances. The two parties should heed the well-meaning appeals from different quarters, not least the Quartet, to resume negotiations without further delay. Arbitrary actions, such as the construction of new settlements in East Jerusalem, the launching of rockets and air strikes and the imposition of blockades, will not solve the problem. Sustained dialogue, no matter how tedious, will in the long run prove to be the most potent weapon for the resolution of intractable conflicts.

The relevance of a two-State solution needs no reiteration in these debates. There is no alternative to it. All parties and interlocutors should take bold measures to create the conditions conducive to the achievement of a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East. Progress in that direction will depend on the resumption of direct negotiations. Demonstrable political will and commitment to the peace process would also be helpful. The international community should continue to support and encourage Israelis and Palestinians to stay the course of peace.

We hope that the next briefing and debate on this question will take place in a different atmosphere, and we look forward to our participation in it.

Mrs. Viotti (Brazil): Let me start by expressing our deep sympathy to China for the tragic loss of lives caused by the earthquake today.

Brazil welcomes the holding of this open debate on the situation in the Middle East. I would like to

thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his briefing and Ambassadors Riyad Mansour and Gabriela Shalev for their contributions.

The situation in the region is volatile again, as confrontations between Israeli security forces and Palestinian protesters, including at religious sites in Jerusalem, have left Palestinians dead and several wounded. Rockets have again been fired, bombs dropped and incursions resumed. This is all very unfortunate and worrisome. Unfortunately, the deterioration in the security situation in the occupied territories is not surprising. We have all long been saying that the status quo is unsustainable. Violence is the visible expression of the lack of hope in view of the absence of a real peace process. We must make no mistake — political and security conditions are likely to deteriorate further if no serious negotiations are initiated very soon. An apparent sense of security created in Israel by military and physical containment is precisely that — only apparent. And even if it proved effective for Israel, it would not be so for other countries which, directly or indirectly, suffer the consequences of this open wound in the Middle East.

An independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State, living side by side with Israel in peace and security within internationally recognized borders, remains the only solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. We therefore welcome the efforts of the United States and others to restart the peace process through the so-called proximity talks. They may help to overcome the current paralysis if they are a credible means to a genuine and comprehensive settlement. We do not need talks about talks, with no immediate effect, howsoever modest, on the reality of the occupied territories. In this context, we welcome the timeline set by the Palestinian Authority and endorsed by the Quartet in its latest declaration on the establishment of a Palestinian State.

The continuation of Israeli policies that prejudge the result of negotiations and change the demographics of the West Bank and East Jerusalem make it more difficult for negotiations to be resumed. We are very concerned about reports of new Israeli regulations that give the military apparently sweeping powers to detain, imprison and deport Palestinians in the West Bank. It is not clear why such measures have been taken at this time and for what practical purpose. There is no doubt, however, that they may become a major source of instability and violence. Palestinians should also do their part. Overcoming their divisions, keeping extremists in check, including in Gaza, and enhancing democratic governance is essential.

While peace is in the hands of the parties themselves, the international community must sustain its involvement throughout the future peace process. This was one of the main considerations that led President Lula to visit the region recently. In all his encounters in Israel, Palestine and Jordan, he pressed for serious, action-oriented negotiations. Brazil reiterates its support for the holding of a comprehensive international conference on the Middle East once conditions are appropriate. Further engagement by relevant players from outside the region will prove beneficial. The international community, including the United Nations, must also continue to support the Palestinian Authority's State-building agenda. As the Secretary-General indicated in his most recent briefing to the Council on 24 March on this issue, Palestinian statehood must become an emerging reality. We are encouraged by the latest positive report of the World Bank on the progress made by the Palestinian Authority in this regard.

Today, the Council is holding yet another open debate in which delegations will regret the humanitarian situation in Gaza, with little practical effect on the ground. Access to basic goods and services remains vastly insufficient. The Israeli decision to allow further exports of Palestinian goods and the entry of building materials, and to approve some United Nations reconstruction projects, should be welcomed. However, it barely scratches the surface of the problem. Israel should act swiftly to reconcile its security concerns with the movement of persons, goods and services into and out of Gaza. We call upon the international community to consider concrete ways to help address the problem.

Another unresolved issue related to the war in Gaza is accountability. There continues to be a need for credible and independent investigations, in line with standard international practice, on the disturbing findings contained in the Goldstone report (A/HRC/12/48).

We must continue to avoid the return of conflict between Lebanon and Israel. All parties must therefore faithfully implement their obligations under resolution 1701 (2006), violations of which should be fully investigated. We also urge the international community

to assist Lebanon in building up its State capacity and helping the central Government to exercise its authority throughout the country.

Peace usually requires difficult decisions to be made by all sides. It does not emerge from skilful tactics but from true statesmanship. Those who believe that there can be peace or security in the Middle East without a Palestinian State are deceiving themselves. Rather than trying to avoid the emergence of such a State, they should help to create the conditions for it to be peaceful, prosperous and democratic.

Mr. Rugunda (Uganda): Uganda joins the other members of the Security Council in expressing condolences and sympathies to the Government and people of China following the deaths, injuries and destruction after the earthquake that occurred there today.

I thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his comprehensive briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I also thank the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their statements.

The peace process in the Middle East is at a critical and delicate phase, and the situation remains tense. Uganda commends the international and regional efforts that have been undertaken to restart negotiations, including the recent United States efforts to start indirect talks between Israel and Palestine. We also commend the willingness of both Israel and the Palestinian leadership to hold indirect peace talks.

However, despite the efforts that have been made to restart negotiations, we are concerned that no progress has been made. We remain convinced that a comprehensive and lasting solution to the Middle East problem will be achieved only through negotiations. We call for the immediate resumption of negotiations with a view to achieving a comprehensive peace based on the vision of two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

We commend the continued efforts of the Palestinians towards fulfilling their obligations under the Road Map, particularly in the security sector, where they have continued to maintain law and order, and in the areas of economic development and State-building. We are concerned about Israel's continued construction of settlements in the occupied territory, which is not consistent with its obligations under the Road Map. We consider Israel's decision to build 1,600 new homes in East Jerusalem and other units near Bethlehem, as well as the inclusion of the two mosques on the list of Israeli national heritage, to be moves that threaten and undermine the trust that is so sorely needed. We call for a complete freeze on all settlement activity, including natural growth.

The deterioration of the security situation is a matter of concern. We deplore the continued rocket attacks on Israel and Israel's continued air strikes on Gaza, which have intensified during the reporting period. These attacks do not help bring the parties to the negotiating table; they only alienate them further. We call on all parties to exercise maximum restraint, avoid further escalation and fully implement resolution 1860 (2009).

We reiterate our concern over the grave humanitarian situation caused by the continued blockade imposed on Gaza. While welcoming the limited opening-up by Israel that has helped a limited number of United Nations projects to start, we feel this does not go far enough. We call for an end to the blockade of Gaza, as called for in resolution 1860 (2009).

We are also concerned that the Palestinian groups have yet to overcome their differences. These divisions are detrimental to overall negotiations on the Middle East question and to efforts for the reconstruction and development of Gaza. We therefore call on all Palestinians to resolve their differences and achieve unity within the framework of the intra-Palestinian dialogue.

On Lebanon, we welcome the national dialogue that took place recently. We see it as a positive step towards resolving the outstanding issues in Lebanon.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I would like first to extend our deepest sympathy to the Chinese delegation in the wake of the tragic earthquake that struck their country.

We are grateful to the Secretariat and Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for the briefing on the situation in the Middle East.

We would like to reiterate the Russian Federation's policy of comprehensive support for an Israeli-Palestinian settlement process, whose final goal should be the establishment of an independent

Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel. Of course, the priority in that connection continues to be the launching of proximity talks, which should eventually lead to direct dialogue. It is clear that it will be extremely difficult for the parties to achieve that. However, there is no alternative to relaunching the peace process on an international legal basis, as endorsed by the Quartet's Moscow statement.

We would like to underscore the need for the parties to fulfil the relevant provisions of the Road Map, first and foremost ending settlement activity. Unfortunately, many of the actions of the Israeli leadership in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, where there are plans for large-scale construction, can only arouse serious alarm. The intention of Israeli authorities to deport a significant number of Palestinians from the West Bank is fraught with additional risks of exacerbating tensions in Israeli-Palestinian relations and the region as a whole, and destabilizing the situation in the Palestinian territories.

We would also like to express our concerns with regard to the ongoing tension in Gaza and the continuing blockade of the Strip, the negative actions of extremists, including rocket fire against Israeli territory, and the disproportionate use of force by Israel, all of which lead to the suffering and death of civilians. The deterioration of the situation in Gaza in March, which is the most serious since the end of the Israeli military operation in December 2008 and January 2009, is a very dangerous development. The Russian Federation is working on that issue with the leadership of Hamas. They have confirmed to us that authorities in the Strip favour preserving calm and that they have no interest in escalating tension. They are taking relevant steps to prevent the firing of rockets from Gaza.

We fully support Mahmoud Abbas as the leader of all Palestinians and his policy aimed at seeking political solutions to complex problems facing Palestinians. At the same time, we would like to underscore the need to restore inter-Palestinian unity on the basis of the Egyptian initiative. Among other things, that would strengthen Palestinian potential for negotiations. Events in that regard continue to have our full attention.

We would like to emphasize that a united Arab position is very important in the current, very complex situation in the peace process. We were pleased to note that, at the League of Arab States summit held in Libya, Arab States demonstrated a responsible approach and expressed their commitment to the Arab Peace Initiative. It is precisely in that spirit that Russia presented its policy during the Quartet's meeting in Moscow, to which I have referred. That very important international step was intended to assist the immediate participants in the dialogue so that they could again begin to work on substantive agreements, with the help of international diplomatic efforts in the Middle East, including those of Senator Mitchell.

Our consistent policy is aimed at ensuring that the Quartet consistently carries out its mission. While we can all agree that the Quartet has not been entirely successful in that regard, it is clear that there is no alternative to the collective working methods adopted in the framework of the Quartet. Close cooperation between the Quartet and the League of Arab States is one of Quartet's best tools for enhancing its effectiveness. We expect that, once Israeli-Palestinian consultations have resumed, more substantial dialogue on an Arab-Israeli settlement will take place at the Moscow Middle East conference.

I should now like to say a few words on Lebanon. We are extremely alarmed by the growing instability along the Blue Line and the statements coming from both sides with regard to the possibility of resumed full-fledged conflict in the zone. It is for that reason that it is now very important to reverse the trend in growing provocative actions, including, for example, Israeli incursions into Lebanese airspace, so as to prevent tensions from escalating into direct military confrontation in southern Lebanon and to achieve strict compliance by all sides with the requirements set out in resolution 1701 (2006). We are convinced that, with the assistance of United Nations forces, the Lebanese Government is a position to provide stability there. With the situation in the region currently alternating between a return to negotiations on a comprehensive Arab-Israeli settlement and a return to confrontation, we cannot allow the Lebanese spark to again ignite conflict in the Middle East.

Mr. Wolff (United States of America): I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his briefing.

Before turning to the subject at hand, let me join other colleagues in extending our condolences to the

Government and people of China on the loss of life and the injuries suffered by so many as a result of the devastating earthquake.

Advancing the cause of comprehensive peace in the Middle East remains one of the United States highest foreign policy priorities. Our commitment to that goal is undiminished, and the resumption of negotiations towards a two-State solution is the best way forward. All concerned must confront a basic reality, that is, that the status quo of the past decade has neither produced long-term security nor served the interests of the parties. Such a path means more instability and more unrealized aspirations for Israelis, Palestinians and others throughout the region.

Today, we are witnessing a struggle between those in the region who accept peace and coexistence with Israel and those who reject it and seek continued violence. The latter course means drawing out a conflict with tragic human costs that threatens Israel's long-term future as a secure and democratic Jewish State and denies Palestinians the dignity of a State of their own. The two-State solution is the only way to resolve the conflict. The status quo strengthens the rejectionists, who claim peace is impossible, and weakens those who embrace coexistence.

At the same time, those willing to negotiate must be able to show results for their efforts. Those who preach violence, strife and bloodshed must be proven wrong. All of the regional challenges that we face, including combating violent extremism and promoting both democracy and economic prosperity, become harder if rejectionists grow in power and influence. The current path is not sustainable for either Israelis or Palestinians.

We therefore call again on our international partners, both inside and outside the Council, to support the resumption of proximity talks that lead, as soon as possible, to direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. We invite all involved to promote an atmosphere of cooperation between the parties, and we renew our specific call for Arab States to establish regional and multilateral dialogues with Israel, concurrent with the resumption of bilateral negotiations. Only through good-faith negotiations can the parties mutually agree on an outcome that ends the conflict and reconciles the Palestinian goal of an independent and viable State based on the 1967 lines, with agreed swaps, and the Israeli goal of a Jewish State with secure and recognized borders that reflect subsequent developments and meet Israeli security requirements. We also believe that the parties can mutually agree on an outcome that realizes the aspirations of both parties for Jerusalem and safeguards its status for people around the world.

The Secretary-General underscored those points when he addressed the Arab League summit in Libya on 27 March. He also conveyed the belief of the Quartet's members that those talks should lead to a settlement, negotiated between the parties within 24 months, that ends the occupation that began in 1967 and results in the emergence of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbours.

It is also important that the parties fulfil their Road Map obligations. Unilateral actions taken by either party cannot be allowed to prejudge the outcome of negotiations and will not be recognized by the international community. Our position remains clear: We do not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlement activity. Israel should also halt evictions and demolitions of Palestinian homes. We have made our views on these issues clear over the past several weeks.

At the same time, the Palestinian Authority should continue to make every effort to ensure security, to reform its institutions of governance and to take strong, consistent action to end all forms of incitement. In this regard, we strongly condemn the glorification of terrorists, either through official statements or by the dedication of public places.

Still, we should not overlook the significant progress made by both sides in the West Bank over the past year, including marked improvements in the local economy, greater fiscal transparency and accountability, advances in the rule of law and the start of a more cooperative practical relationship between Israelis and Palestinians that we hope will develop further.

The Palestinian Authority has demonstrated its commitment to reform and institution-building. It is laying the foundations of a future Palestinian State. The Authority's strong fiscal policies, supported by more than $3 billion in donor assistance over the past two years, and its commitment to improving security and the rule of law in the West Bank helped generate significant economic growth in 2009.

The Palestinian Authority's actions are inspiring investor and consumer confidence, and we are seeing positive signs of private sector growth and development in the West Bank. For instance, three venture capital funds are set to be launched this spring, with the support of United States, Arab and European investors. The Authority is also beginning to prepare for an investment conference in Bethlehem in June that will focus on small- and medium-size enterprises. Meanwhile, subscription rates in Wataniya, the Palestinian's second mobile telephone provider, have continued to climb since its launch in November 2009. And nine affordable housing initiatives, which could result in 16,000 new units, are in various stages of development throughout the West Bank. We strongly endorse the Palestinian Authority's two-year programme to build the institutions for a Palestinian State that will undergird this progress.

Israel has also taken significant steps to improve Palestinian access to domestic and external markets, including by easing checkpoints. For example, thousands of vehicles per week have been entering the West Bank from Israel through the Jalameh-Gilboa crossing since it was reopened and expanded in November 2009. This step, coupled with continued relaxation of checkpoints between Jenin, Nablus and Ramallah has helped infuse cash and raise demands for goods and services into the northern West Bank. In another example, tens of thousands of people travel to Bethlehem from Israel and the West Bank during the Christmas season, contributing millions of dollars to the local economy.

Of course, these signs of increased economic activity and growth can be undermined by renewed violence. And more needs to be done. But we should not ignore these reminders that Israelis and Palestinians can work together to build a brighter future for ordinary citizens on both sides.

In contrast, the situation for civilians in Gaza remains extremely difficult, despite some small recent steps forward. The Palestinian Authority is in effect a lifeline to more than half a million people in Gaza, making sure that Palestinian Authority salaries are paid and social welfare payments are made on time. The Authority plans to devote roughly half of its $3.9 billion budget to Gaza in 2010. We urge all parties and partners, including Israel, to focus on meeting the humanitarian needs of those in Gaza and rebuilding the civilian private sector that will be the engine of Gaza's recovery.

Israel has taken steps to improve the flow of humanitarian goods into Gaza in order to alleviate the hardship and stress that civilians in Gaza continue to face every day. Israel has also increased the quantity and scope of non-food items entering and exiting Gaza through the official crossings to include glass, wood, aluminium, some constructions material, including cement, and some other goods. Israel has also agreed to the completion of several critical United Nations projects.

We continue to urge Israel to further open the crossings, consistent with resolution 1860 (2009) and the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access, and with appropriate monitoring to address security concerns, in order to allow the unimpeded flow to and from Gaza of people, humanitarian aid and commercial goods.

Hamas's interference with international assistance shipments and the work of our non-governmental organization partners complicates our efforts in Gaza. Hamas's continued arms smuggling and its recent direct interference with the official commercial banking system undermine security and prosperity for Palestinians and Israelis alike. Hamas has yet to accept the principles established by the Quartet that are the building blocks of an independent Palestinian State: renouncing violence, recognizing Israel and accepting previous agreements. Nor has it shown an interest in building a future for the Palestinian people that could exceed its own hateful rhetoric and embrace of violence.

We have recently seen a significant increase in rocket attacks from Gaza into Israel — a direct threat to international peace and security. There were 20 such attacks in March alone, and a total of 40 this year. Groups other than Hamas have claimed responsibility for these terrorist attacks. Nevertheless, Hamas asserted control of Gaza in 2007 and is thus accountable for ensuring that these attacks cease. We also call again for the immediate release of Gilad Shalit, abducted and held by Hamas since 2006.

In closing, permit me to remind the Council of the important role that Lebanon can play in efforts to secure a comprehensive peace. The Special Tribunal for Lebanon remains a key tool to end the era of impunity for political assassinations in Lebanon. As

Secretary of State Clinton has noted, the Tribunal is not a bargaining chip; it is an independent judicial process. United States support for the Tribunal in its pursuit of justice will not waiver. We reiterate our support for Lebanon's sovereign Government and for the full implementation of resolutions 1559 (2004), 1680 (2006) and 1701 (2006), all of which are equally binding.

But the transfer of weapons from Syria to Hizbullah undermines the Lebanese Government's ability to exercise sovereignty over all of its territory and risks sparking a conflict that no one needs. We are increasingly concerned about the sophistication of the weaponry being transferred. We have continued to reiterate our strong concerns to the Syrian and Lebanese authorities, and we have made clear that they need to be taking steps that reduce the risk and danger of conflict, not taking steps that increase it.

The United States has continued to emphasize to all relevant parties the importance of implementing Security Council resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006), which call for ending weapons smuggling into Lebanon and for the disarmament of Hizbullah, among other things. We remain committed to supporting Lebanon's sovereignty and independence and working to strengthen our partners in the Lebanese Government and armed forces.

The President: I will now make a statement in my capacity as representative of Japan.

I too join my colleagues in thanking Mr. Pascoe for his update, and I am also very grateful to Ambassador Shalev and Ambassador Mansour for their respective contributions.

The only way to achieve durable peace is through sincere negotiations in good faith between the parties concerned. We support in particular the effort by the United States to hold proximity talks and to restart direct negotiations between the parties. We appreciate the 19 March statement of the Quartet in that regard. We encourage the parties to take the initiative to restart direct negotiations. The negotiations should lead to a two-State solution, which will end the 1967 occupation of the territories, including East Jerusalem. Japan supports and assists the Palestinian Authority's plan for building a Palestinian State within 24 months by extending assistance for institution- and capacity-building. Palestinian unity is essential for realizing peace in the Middle East.

Both parties must carry out their obligations and commitments under the Road Map. We call on the Israeli Government to freeze all settlement activities in the West Bank and not to implement the decision to build new housing units in East Jerusalem. Any act that could prejudice the final status negotiations should not be taken. We also call on Israel not to implement measures that place an undue burden on the Palestinians in the West Bank.

With respect to the Palestinian Authority, we call upon it to continue in its efforts to improve the security situation and to fulfil its commitment to cease violence and act of terrorism.

More than one year after resolution 1860 (2009) was adopted and the end of the Israel military operations in Gaza, the Israeli blockade continues to create a serious humanitarian situation in Gaza. Such a situation is unacceptable. We strongly hope that the recent modest but positive step taken by Israel will be followed by freer movement of goods and materials for reconstruction. We also call on all who are responsible for the rocket fire into Israel to stop such actions immediately.

I resume my function as President of the Security Council. I now have the honour of giving the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt): I have the pleasure today to address the Security Council on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. I will begin by expressing the sincere sentiments of solidarity and sympathy of the Movement's members with the Government and the People of China as it tackles the consequences of the massive earthquake that struck them today, resulting in human and material losses.

I would like to begin my statement by emphasizing the importance of convening this open debate at this critical juncture where the international community, including the members of the Quartet, exerts tireless efforts to bring about a two-State solution and achieve comprehensive peace in the Middle East region. Advancing the cause of peace by ending Israel's occupation of the Palestinian and Arab territories that it has occupied since 1967 remains one of the most important priorities and goals of the Non-Aligned Movement. The Non-Aligned Movement's commitment to the goal of peace is unwavering, but the current Israeli practices and policies in the Occupied Palestinian Territory,

including East Jerusalem, raise concerns and doubts about Israel's intentions with regard to achieving peace and about the viability of the two-State solution.

Despite the international consensus on the two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders and the serious efforts by all international and regional partners to relaunch negotiations, including proximity talks, a just and lasting settlement to the question of Palestine is still visibly far from being achieved owing to Israel's positions and continued non-compliance with international law and Security Council resolutions.

A serious effort by the Security Council is needed to strengthen efforts aimed at overcoming the current impasse and pressing for the early resumption and conclusion of the negotiating process. Obviously, negotiations cannot be resumed while measures exist to forcibly impose a fait accompli on the Palestinian people by altering the demographic composition, character and status of the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly in and around East Jerusalem.

The Non-Aligned Movement reiterates its demand that Israel, the occupying Power, adhere to international law and international humanitarian law, fulfil its obligations under the road map and promote an environment conducive to negotiations and achieving peace. The Movement reaffirms that no unilateral action undertaken by Israel will be allowed to prejudice the outcome of negotiations nor will it be recognized by the international community. The international community, including the Security Council, must be resolute in confronting Israeli settlement activities and in demanding that Israel abide by its obligations. Israel must unambiguously negotiate on and resolve all core issues, namely, Jerusalem, settlements, refugees, borders, security and water, in a comprehensive manner and within a fixed time frame.

The Security Council has an obligation towards that objective. It must shoulder its responsibility in maintaining peace and security in the Middle East and in the establishment of an independent and viable State of Palestine on the basis of the two-State solution. The Non-Aligned Movement is alarmed at Israel's continued provocations and taking of illegal measures in the West Bank, including in and around occupied East Jerusalem, particularly plans for building new settlement units and measures to control and annex holy religious sites. The Movement condemns the Israeli announcement that it will include the Ibrahimi Mosque in Al-Khalil (Hebron), the site of Bilal's Mosque in Bethlehem (Rachel's Tomb) and the Walls of the Old City of Jerusalem in its national heritage listing. Further, the Movement condemns attacks carried out by the Israeli occupying forces against Palestinian worshippers at the Al-Haram al-Sharif compound, including Al-Aqsa Mosque. In this regard, it is imperative that the Security Council bear in mind the religious sensitivity and feelings of frustration and despair prevailing around the world owing to the repeated Israeli attempts to alter the character, composition and status of East Jerusalem and to control religious holy sites, often without any reaction from the Council.

Recalling that the annexation of occupied East Jerusalem is illegal, null and void and has not been recognized by the United Nations and the international community, the Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms that East Jerusalem is an integral part of the occupied Palestinian territory and is the capital of the future State of Palestine. In this regard, the Non-Aligned Movement condemns the decision by the Government of Israel to move forward with planning for new housing units in and around the City, including the announcement of the approval for the construction of 1,600 new settlement units in East Jerusalem and 112 other units near Bethlehem, in defiance of the broad international consensus against them and the repeated calls to stop all settlement activities.

The Movement welcomes the Quartet's intention to monitor developments closely in and around Jerusalem and to consider additional steps that might be required to address the situation on the ground. The Movement calls on the Security Council to take similar steps and reaffirm its previous resolutions on East Jerusalem, particularly resolution 478 (1980), in order to stop further deterioration in the already volatile situation and to promote a climate conducive to the pursuit of peace.

The unresolved crisis in Gaza also continues to cause negative repercussions on efforts to advance peace in the region and inflicts unacceptable suffering on the Palestinian civilian population. We continue to witness unbearable human suffering caused by the continuing illegal Israeli blockade. In this regard, we reiterate that international humanitarian law, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention, and United Nations resolutions must be respected. The

Non-Aligned Movement demands that Israel immediately lift its illegal blockade and implement resolution 1860 (2009) and the resolution of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly (A/RES/ES-10/6).

The Movement welcomes all endeavours aimed at achieving this goal, including Secretary-General's visit to Gaza and his efforts to enable the immediate and sustained opening of all border crossings in order to alleviate the crisis in Gaza and ensure its urgent reconstruction. Further, the Non-Aligned Movement stresses once again the urgent need to begin reconstruction in Gaza immediately and deplores Israel's continued obstruction of the reconstruction process, including projects to be implemented by the United Nations, despite the availability of financial resources.

The Non-Aligned Movement further emphasizes the importance of conducting investigations into the serious violations of international humanitarian and international human rights law reported by the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict, known as the Goldstone report (A/HRC/12/48). Those investigations must be independent and credible and conform with international standards. The Non-Aligned Movement further stresses the importance and urgency of Palestinian reconciliation and reiterates its support for all efforts to achieve it, including Egyptian and regional endeavours.

In addressing the situation in the Middle East, the Non-Aligned Movement remains deeply concerned over Israel's ongoing systematic violations of Lebanon's sovereignty, in breach of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), and the threat of potential escalation. The Movement reiterates its call for the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), including Israel's full withdrawal from all Lebanese territories in the Shab'a farms, the Kfar Shuba hills and the northern part of Al-Ghajar village.

On the occupied Syrian Golan, the Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms that all measures and actions taken or to be taken by Israel, the occupying Power, to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan and its institutional structure, as well as measures to impose jurisdiction and administration there, are null, void and have no legal effect. The Non-Aligned Movement demands that Israel abide by resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of June 4, 1967, in implementation of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

In conclusion, the Non-Aligned Movement remains committed to the goal of the two-State solution for peace and highlights the serious consequences of the ongoing Israeli measures in the region. It is vital at this critical juncture that all parties shoulder their responsibilities to move towards a comprehensive and durable settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Furthermore, the international community has to take a robust posture to strengthen the process and to reaffirm clear terms of reference for negotiations on all core issues of the Palestinian track, as grounded in resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1850 (2008), the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map. The international community, including the Security Council, must not allow Israeli intransigence and illegal measures to obstruct its decisive steps to translate the two-State vision into reality.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic): I have the honour to make this statement on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) Group.

Allow me at the outset to thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe for his comprehensive briefing. I should also like also to praise your able presidency, Sir, and the successful presidency of our colleague, the Permanent Representative of Gabon, last month.

I would like to extend our deepest condolences to the Permanent Representative of China and, through him, to his Government and people.

For the umpteenth time since the inception of the United Nations in 1945, we meet in the Security Council to discuss the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, which is being endangered again by irresponsible and illegal Israeli acts that could lead the region as a whole into another war, with great potential to spread uncontrollably through the region and beyond. Once again, Israel has turned its back on the increased efforts of international community aimed at resuming the peace talks, and has failed to respond accordingly to its requirements, foremost among which is the implementation of the international resolutions calling for its full withdrawal

from all occupied Arab territories to the lines of 4 June, 1967. In effect, the Israeli Government continues to perpetrate illegal actions aimed at forcibly and aggressively imposing a fait accompli on the Palestinian people through its military might. It is obvious that the continuation of such unlawful and provocative Israeli behaviour will endanger the achievement of a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

These illegal Israeli measures include the unbridled and unlawful escalation of settlement activities, dealing a critical blow to the Middle East peace process; the ongoing three-year blockade of the Gaza Strip, slowly choking off the essentials of life; the irresponsible and aggressive decision to add the Ibrahimi mosque and the mosque of Bilal ibn Rabah to a list of so-called Israeli heritage sites; the shameful approval issued by the Israeli Supreme Court to construct a so-called museum of tolerance by destroying and building over one of the oldest Islamic cemeteries in Jerusalem; the continued construction of the separation wall; the revocation of Palestinian residency rights in the city; the eviction of Palestinian families from the city; the imposition of severe restrictions to movement, which have already isolated the city from the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory; the issuance just two days ago of an extremely dangerous new Israeli order that gives the occupying forces power to detain, imprison and deport Palestinians in the West Bank; and the dangerous continued digging and excavation work in and around Al-Aqsa mosque and its vicinity.

These violations are the most prominent evidence of the policy of ethnic cleansing and aggression being pursued by Israel, the occupying Power, and of the intention of Israeli decision-makers to wage a fatal war on the peace process and to undermine international efforts to bring a just and comprehensive peace to the region. The OIC strongly condemns these Israeli violations and calls for the immediate cessation of all such activities, in accordance with the occupying Power's obligations under international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and the many relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

In this regard, the OIC recalls, inter alia, Security Council Resolutions 446 (1979), 465 (1980) and 478 (1980), which all remain valid and must be implemented. The OIC Group demands that Israel also abide by resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003) and withdraw from the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem to the lines of 4 June 1967.

Despite the unanimous international rejection of Israel's de facto annexation of Al-Quds Al-Sharif in 1980, and despite the strong calls for Israel's immediate cessation of all colonization measures, Israel, the occupying Power, continues its illegal campaign geared to changing the Palestinian Arab identity of the holy city of Al-Quds. The OIC members reaffirmed, at the thirty-sixth ministerial meeting held in Damascus, that all Israeli colonial settlement measures and practices in Al-Quds and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory are null and void, and requests urgently the Security Council to revive the International Supervision and Monitoring Committee to Prevent and Prohibit Colonial Settlement in Al-Quds and the Occupied Arab Territories.

We strongly condemn the attacks by the Israeli occupying forces perpetrated against Palestinian worshippers at Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Al-Haram Al-Sharif compound in Al-Quds Al-Sharif. Any provocative or illegal, unilateral actions against the holy mosque of Al-Aqsa will have very serious repercussions for the Islamic world and could incite another cycle of violence likely to destabilize the region and the rest of the world.

The OIC Group strongly condemns the Israeli Government's decision to usurp illegally Al-Haram Al-Ibrahimi in the occupied Palestinian city of Al-Khalil and Masjid Bilal in the occupied city of Bethlehem. The OIC Group stresses the illegality of the Israeli Government's decision and considers it as null and void and without any effect whatsoever.

The OIC Group calls on the United Nations, including the Security Council, to shoulder its responsibilities in taking the urgent necessary measures to compel the Israeli Government to revoke its irresponsible decisions and to refrain from any further provocative acts aimed at undermining the chances to achieve a just and comprehensive peace settlement.

The Israeli Government, as all know, continues to ignore the international community's demands to lift the unlawful blockade it has imposed on the Gaza Strip for the past three years. The OIC condemns this inhumane blockade and expresses serious concern about the grave deterioration of socio-economic

conditions and the deepening of the humanitarian crisis of Palestinian civilians. The OIC calls on Israel to end its collective punitive measures imposed on the civilian population in Gaza and calls for the immediate lifting by Israel of the unjust Israeli blockade and for the opening of all crossing points with Gaza, in accordance with international law and United Nations resolutions.

This is the first time in human history that people are being prevented from leaving a war zone, seeking safety. The OIC welcomes the adoption by the General Assembly of its resolution 64/254, of 26 February 2010, on the second follow-up to the report of the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on Gaza Conflict. The Group is of the view that that resolution constitutes an important step in pursuing accountability for these Israeli violations, which were confirmed in the Goldstone report (A/HRC/12/48). Thus, more actions should be taken by the relevant United Nations bodies, including the Security Council, to bring the Israeli perpetrators of these crimes to justice and to put an end to Israel's impunity and above-the-law mentality.

The OIC remains deeply concerned by Israel's ongoing air and land violations of Lebanon's sovereignty, in breach of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), and calls on Israel to withdraw fully from the remaining Lebanese occupied land in the Shab'a farms, the Kafr Shuba hills and the northern part of the village of Ghajar.

The OIC also joins the international community's stance in reaffirming that all measures and actions taken, or to be taken, by Israel, the occupying Power, to alter the legal, physical or demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan and its institutional structure, as well as the Israeli measures to impose jurisdiction and administration there, are null and void and have no legal effect. The OIC demands that Israel abide fully and immediately by Security Council resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the lines of 4 June 1967, in implementation also of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

The OIC calls for the intensification of efforts by the international community, including by the Security Council in line with its Charter responsibilities, aimed at accelerating the process of achieving a just and comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East on the basis of relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, including the principle of land for peace, and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The OIC reiterates, in this regard, its firm and unwavering support for the establishment of the State of Palestine based on a commitment to the right of sovereignty over the Palestinian territory occupied in 1967, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, and a just solution for the plight of the Palestine refugees on the basis of General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

(*spoke in Arabic*)

Allow me now to speak in my national capacity. Today, we have had the pleasure of hearing statements by the members of the Council that condemned Israel's actions and the unilateral measures it has adopted. It has done so in contravention of its commitments as occupying Power, as set out in the Geneva Conventions of 1949, the laws of war and The Hague Convention of 1907. These Israeli actions contravene the international community's will to establish a comprehensive, just peace in the region, with the creation of a Palestinian State within the 4 June 1967 borders.

It would seem that the Israeli representative and her Government do not recognize the agreements commonly known as the Geneva Conventions, the laws of war, the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly or the 38 resolutions adopted by the Security Council. Allow me to reiterate that the number of international resolutions adopted by the Council, the General Assembly and the United Nations specialized agencies against Israel are more numerous than the resolutions adopted by the membership on any other subject since the creation of our Organization.

A great many Israeli political leaders, both military and civilian, can no longer travel freely because they are accused of having committed war crimes. This is a reality, and a truth that needs to be borne in mind constantly, both here in the Council and in other United Nations forums.

It is high time to set up a commission of inquiry to examine all resolutions adopted by the United Nations since 1948. The result, it will be seen, would be striking. We also have to consider the option of setting up a committee that would produce a register in which we could record all the terrorist crimes committed by Israel since its creation. We recently witnessed the actions taken by the Mossad in Dubai.

Paragraph 39 of the most recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2010/105) on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) states that the Lebanese Government "has not reported any breach of the arms embargo imposed by resolution 1701 (2006)". There are two reports, and neither makes reference to the transfer of arms and weapons across the Syria-Lebanon border, something that Israel claims. Israel's allegations have a single, precise objective: to divert the attention focused on Israel's primary responsibility for the exacerbation of tensions in the Middle East and to divert attention from Israel's threats against its neighbours and the entire region.

Yesterday, Israel prevented a Mediterranean-European conference from reaching agreement on the issue of the water shortage in the Middle East. The reason for the failure of the conference is quite simple: the European and Arab States referred to the occupied Palestinian territories in the conference's final document, and Israel simply does not recognize the existence of occupied territories. It continues to flout the Geneva Conventions and the norms of international law. The very mention of the occupied territories in that document was rejected by Israel in Paris yesterday.

As for nuclear weapons, it is an outrage; it is scandalous. All of us are aware of the situation — and incidentally, the source of the information is not Syrian but Swedish. All are familiar with this book, an international benchmark in nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. Over 15 pages therein concern Israeli nuclear weapons. Israel possesses a nuclear arsenal made up of over 300 nuclear bombs, and nuclear missiles with a range of over 7,000 kilometres that can strike Europe, China and America.

Israel is the only country in the Middle East that has not yet joined the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. It has obstructed the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East, an initiative launched by Syria in 2003 when it was a member of the Security Council. This initiative was not successful for reasons with which all present are familiar.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me to echo the words of previous speakers by conveying my sincerest condolences to the Government and people of China and the families of the victims of this morning's devastating earthquake.

It is an honour for me to speak on behalf of the Arab Group to assess the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

We would also like to thank Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Lynn Pascoe for his briefing earlier. It was important, as it reminded the international community of its responsibilities towards the Palestinian people suffering a terrible occupation by Israel, which persists in contravention of its international commitments and continues to occupy Arab territories.

It is unfortunate that after more than 60 years of considering the Palestinian question, which is at the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the international community remains preoccupied with the issue as a result of its inability to achieve a peaceful solution for the Palestinian people and to restore their land to them. Israel, the occupying Power, ignores the will, resolutions and repeated appeals of the international community. It continues to occupy Arab and Palestinian territories and to stifle peaceful efforts to relieve its illegal occupation, which has gone on since 1967, in defiance of the international community.

Israel's practices in the occupied Palestinian territories, including the Gaza Strip; its inhuman siege of Gaza, its construction of the separation wall; restrictions on the free movement of people; the Judaization of Jerusalem; and the recent decision by the occupation forces to deport tens of thousands of Palestinians from their homes in the West Bank and in Jerusalem while enabling Jews from all over the world to settle in Palestine, including Jerusalem East, are all proof that Israel, the occupying Power, is simply the defying international community, international law and United Nations resolutions. That contradicts the claims of the Israeli authorities that Israel is a partner in the peace process and that it respects its commitment to a two-State solution. Prime Minister Netanyahu gave a speech last month in which he said that Jerusalem is Israel's eternal capital and that settlements will continue. That is proof of Israel's intransigence and contempt for Security Council resolutions and the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Times of War.

The international community condemns such provocations and escalation. It is clear that the persistence of the occupation is not only due to Israel's refusal to accept the will of the international

community and its international obligations vis-à-vis the Security Council and the United Nations Charter, but also because the Security Council allows it to behave in all impunity, as if it were above the law. That has contributed to Israel's persistent lack of respect for United Nations resolutions and the resulting political instability and insecurity in the region. That is why the Security Council today must shoulder its legal responsibility and adopt measures to create an independent Palestinian State, with its capital in East Jerusalem, within the 4 June 1967 borders.

The Quartet met in Moscow last month and condemned Israel's settlement activities. We call upon the Quartet to remain faithful to its basic position of principle that calls for an end to Israel's settlement policies in Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, and to so-called natural growth, which are serious obstacles to a just and comprehensive peace. The international community today must reject Israel's arguments as it seeks to justify its settlement activities and must pressure it to respect Security Council resolutions 465 (1980) and 497 (1981), on this issue.

It is obvious that Israel interpreted the Arab Peace Initiative as a sign of weakness, so it persisted in its aggressive practices and violence against the Palestinians and intensified its blockade of Gaza, with its consequent humanitarian tragedy, as witnessed by the Board of Inquiry and by the Secretary-General during his recent visit to the region. The Secretary-General stated that the blockade had led to unacceptable human suffering and that Israel must lift it and abstain from implementing measures to block humanitarian aid.

Israel is harming religious sensitivities by desecrating holy places and by placing the Ibrahimi and Bilal bin Rabah mosques on its heritage list. These buildings lie within occupied Palestinian territory, and their identity cannot be changed, which is what Israel is doing when it seeks to change the Arab character of East Jerusalem and other occupied Arab land. The Arab Group appreciated the resolution adopted by the Executive Board of UNESCO, rejecting Israel's unilateral measures to change the demographic character and the status of Jerusalem.

Given the fact that there is no serious Israeli interlocutor willing to shoulder its international responsibility, we fear that the Arab Peace Initiative may become a dead letter because of Israel's illegal practices and policies and its unilateral measures aimed at changing the demographic and geographic character of the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem. Israel is seeking to circumvent the underlying principles for the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with Jerusalem as its capital.

In that context, I reaffirm the Arab position demanding Israeli withdrawal from all Arab territories occupied since 4 June 1967, including Shab'a farms, Kafr Shouba and the village of Ghajar in southern Lebanon, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), as well as the Road Map, the Arab Peace Initiative and the principle of land for peace, which are all aimed at achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive peace.

The President: Since there are so many speakers remaining, I propose to listen to only one more this morning. I would like to invite Mr. Pedro Serrano, Acting Head of the delegation of the European Union, to take the floor.

Mr. Serrano (European Union): Let me begin by thanking you, Sir, for inviting the European Union to this important debate. Many thanks also to Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his report.

I wish to join others, at the outset, in conveying the condolences and sympathy of the European Union to the people and Government of China for the victims and losses suffered in today's earthquake.

The candidate countries, Turkey, Croatia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and the European Free Trade Association country Iceland, member of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine, align themselves with this statement.

Negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis were last held in December 2008. The absence of negotiations and the ensuing vacuum has been a source of great concern to the European Union and the international community. The resumption of negotiations remains an absolute necessity, now more urgent than ever. The European Union calls on both Israelis and Palestinians to resume meaningful negotiations on all final status issues without further delay. A failure to do so will have negative

consequences and obstruct efforts to bring peace and stability to the Middle East.

The European Union has strongly supported international efforts led by the United States and aimed at resuming negotiations. A firm, ambitious and sustained effort from the United States remains indispensable. The European Union will continue to work closely with the United States and support its efforts. At the same time, the European Union, together with its Quartet and Arab League partners, will continue actively to look for ways to ensure a peace deal, which should be finalized within the 24-month period mentioned in the Quartet statement agreed in Moscow on 19 March 2010. The European Union continues to support reinvigorated Quartet engagement.

The creation of the State of Palestine and the realization of the two-State solution remain a core European interest. The European Union is also ready to step up its efforts by facilitating and sustaining peace agreements. The European Union will continue to work on contributions in the areas of State-building, regional issues, refugees, security and Jerusalem, and will continue to assist Palestinian state-building in preparation for Palestinian statehood. It is ready to extend full diplomatic, political and economic support to the Palestinian Authority's Government Plan "Palestine, Ending the Occupation, Establishing the State".

In order to restore credibility to the peace process the parties should implement their respective agreed obligations under the first phase of the Road Map. This should take place in parallel with a resumption of negotiations on all final status issues. Israel must end all settlement activities in East Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank, including natural growth. It should dismantle all outposts erected since March 2001. Palestinian institutions in Jerusalem should be allowed to reopen. The Palestinian side must continue to implement its obligations to end violence.

The European Union is deeply concerned about the situation in East Jerusalem and calls on all parties to refrain from further provocative actions. The European Union has never recognized the annexation of East Jerusalem. If there is to be a genuine peace, a way must be found through negotiations to resolve the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of two States. All discriminatory treatment of Palestinians in East Jerusalem must stop.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza continues to be a source of deep concern. The physical and political divisions between Gaza and the West Bank undermine the efforts of the international community to resume a meaningful peace process. Gaza must be an integral part of the future State of Palestine. The continued policy of closure is both counterproductive and unacceptable. The European Union reiterates its call for the urgent and full implementation of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) and for the immediate, sustained and unconditional opening of crossings for the flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons. The European Union calls on those holding the abducted Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit to release him without delay. The European Union further emphasizes the importance of appropriate and credible investigations, in accordance with international standards, into possible violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law by the parties to the conflict.

European Union assistance aimed at supporting the peace process stands at more than €1 billion per year. The European Union will continue to provide this support. The European Union also calls on all regional actors to undertake confidence-building measures in order to stimulate mutual trust, and encourages Arab countries to be forthcoming, both politically and financially, in assisting the Palestinian Authority and Palestinian refugees through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. The European Union hopes and expects that all parties to the conflict will shoulder their responsibilities and move towards lasting peace.

The President: With the Council's concurrence, I intend to suspend the meeting until 3 p.m. Thank you for your cooperation.

The meeting was suspended at 1.25 p.m.

Security Council

Sixty-fifth year

Provisional

6298th meeting

Wednesday, 14 April 2010, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Takasu	(Japan)
Members:	Austria	Ms. Juen
	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Ms. Marinčić
	Brazil	Mr. Garcia
	China	Mr. Huang Hongjiang
	France	Mr. Kassianides
	Gabon	Mrs. Ntyam-Ehya
	Lebanon	Ms. Ziade
	Mexico	Mr. Rodiles Bretón
	Nigeria	Mr. Edokpa
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Turkey	Mr. Dizdar
	Uganda	Mr. Kamudoli
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Afshar
	United States of America	Ms. Masilko

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting resumed at 3.10 p.m.

The President: I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than five minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously.

I now give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Mr. Shawabkah (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of April. I also wish to commend your predecessor for the prudent manner in which he conducted the work of the Council in March. I would also like to thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his comprehensive briefing.

I should like to convey my condolences to the Government and people of China for today's earthquake.

Jordan associates itself with the statements made by the representatives of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and of the Syrian Arab Republic on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

There is a great deal of stress and tension in our region because of the lack of real and concrete progress towards achieving the two-State solution and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. The severe tension in the Middle East may have alarming consequences if the Israeli Government continues to flout the international consensus in favour of the two-State solution and comprehensive peace based on agreed terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative; to defy the resolutions of international legitimacy; and to pursue its intensified and provocative unilateral practices in the occupied Palestinian territories, in particular in East Jerusalem. The perpetuation of the status quo would undermine the sincere efforts being made in that respect, fuel violence and drag the region and its people into chaos and conflict. That, in turn, would have negative repercussions on the security of the world as a whole.

The only way to avert that bleak scenario and to reach a bright future lies in the intensification of international efforts in the coming months to achieve tangible progress towards the implementation of the two-State solution — the only option for resolving the Palestinian question and confirmed again and again in the Security Council's resolutions. Jordan, under the leadership of His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Al Hussein, is committed to continuing its work with all parties concerned to achieve regional peace and security on the basis of that solution, leading to the establishment of an independent, viable and contiguous Palestinian State on Palestinian national territory, living side by side in peace and security with Israel, with its capital in East Jerusalem and on the basis of the borders of 4 June 1967.

In that regard, Jordan highly appreciates the lead role of the United States and stresses the importance of its ongoing efforts and the efforts of the international Quartet, the European Union and all stakeholders to relaunch serious negotiations with clear timelines and benchmarks to measure progress towards the two-State solution in a regional context of comprehensive peace based on agreed principles of international legitimacy, in particular the Arab Peace Initiative.

Jordan has repeatedly expressed its grave concern about and frank condemnation and rejection of all Israeli practices in the occupied Palestinian territories, with East Jerusalem at their heart. We have repeatedly warned against their consequences for international peace and security, especially considering the esteemed place held by Jerusalem in the minds and souls of hundreds of millions of Christians and Muslims throughout the world. We warn again today that the continuation of such illegal, illegitimate and condemned procedures in the occupied Palestinian territories in general, and in East Jerusalem in particular, and Israel's feverish attempts to Judaize these territories will drag the entire region into a situation it will be unable to control, posing a major threat to international peace and security, the maintenance of which is a principal function of this Council.

The practices of the Israeli Government in the occupied Palestinian territories contradict the spirit of genuine peace and reflect no desire for peace. Israel has pursued its provocative unilateral measures in occupied East Jerusalem, including excavation around and underneath sacred Islamic and Christian sites, in particular the Al-Haram Al-Sharif; the demolition of homes; the obstruction of the work of the Palestinian Endowment administration; the confiscation of lands; the expulsion of Arab residents; and ongoing attempts

to create new realities on the ground, to change the demographic nature of occupied East Jerusalem, to obliterate the Arab, Islamic and Christian features of the city, and to alter the legal status of the city under Israeli occupation.

Such practices are illegal, illegitimate and null and void, and must not continue. They contravene international humanitarian law, the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Times of War, and relevant United Nations resolutions, including many adopted by this Council. They represent a grave violation of Israel's obligations and commitments as the occupying Power.

For the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, under the leadership of His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Al Hussein, the desecration of the holy city is a red line that cannot be crossed. Jerusalem will remain a priority of our country and we will spare no effort to preserve it, to protect and maintain the Islamic and Christian holy sites, to safeguard the Arab nature and identity of the city, to end the Israeli occupation, and to support its steadfast people. The international community must promptly hold Israel accountable for its actions and urge it to end violations that undermine the prospects for peace and impose a fait accompli. Jordan calls on the international community to see to it that no irresponsible measures are undertaken to undermine the potential for negotiations between the two parties.

Jordan appreciates the clear positions recently enunciated by the international community, including the Quartet, which has emphasized the importance of Jerusalem and reiterated that East Jerusalem is an integral part of the territories occupied in 1967. It has also condemned the settlement activities there and in the other occupied Palestinian territories, all of which are blatant violations of international humanitarian law and of Israel's obligations under the Road Map.

The Israeli settlements and their ongoing construction are an unbearable burden to the Palestinians, their movement and their development, and represent a genuine obstacle to international and regional efforts to relaunch the negotiations. They undermine the prospects for a peaceful solution and a future independent, viable and contiguous Palestinian State. We call upon Israel to immediately and completely halt all such activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, first and foremost in East Jerusalem, including so-called natural growth.

Achieving peace requires a radical change in the tragic status quo experienced by the Palestinians in the occupied territories, especially in the Gaza Strip. We call upon the international community, owing to its humanitarian and legal responsibility, to support our Palestinian brothers and sisters, to provide humanitarian assistance, to end their suffering and its consequences, to take immediate, effective action to ensure that Israel abides by resolution 1860 (2009), and to work to lift the blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip. We in Jordan will spare no effort in continuing to provide all forms of support for our Palestinian brothers and sisters and in making others aware of their profound suffering.

Israel must know that it cannot depend on occupation, walls and military power indefinitely. It cannot be governed by a fortress mentality. Genuine, lasting peace for Israel will never come about until that country can become naturally integrated with its surroundings and can coexist peacefully with other countries of the region.

The explicit collective commitment of the Arab and Islamic States, which constitute more than a third of the United Nations membership, to attaining such a peace is reflected in their support for the Arab Peace Initiative adopted at the 2002 Beirut summit. This is a key starting point for addressing all aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Today we repeat our call to seize the historic opportunity presented by the Arab Peace Initiative to put an end to conflict and establish a just and comprehensive peace on the basis of the two-State solution, to put an end to the occupation of all Syrian and Lebanese territory and to ensure peace and security for all the States and peoples of the region.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Mrs. Juul (Norway): As Under-Secretary-General Pascoe noted in his briefing, yesterday in Madrid, Norway chaired the biannual meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC), the coordination mechanism for the international donor community. The purpose of the meeting was to take stock of the implementation of the Palestinian Government's two-year plan and to discuss the way forward. Launched in August 2009, the plan is a political vision for the establishment of a Palestinian State and the

primary platform for the engagement of the international donor community.

Prime Minister Fayyad reported that his Government is on track with the implementation of the plan. Some sectors are in need of additional attention, while others are developing beyond expectations. But overall the Palestinian Authority is progressing towards the goal of completing the State-building process by the end of 2011. In the Prime Minister's words, we are approaching "the home stretch" of the Palestinian State-building process and seeing the contours of an emerging Palestinian State structure.

The Palestinian economy, however, is suffering. While economic growth for 2009 is estimated at around 7 per cent, there is doubt as to whether that growth can be sustained unless Israel continues easing restrictions and allows the Palestinian economy to flourish. A precondition for a sustainable Palestinian economy and reduced donor dependency is access and movement of goods and people throughout the Palestinian territory. East Jerusalem constitutes 12 per cent of the Palestinian economy and must become an integral part of the West Bank. The Palestinian Authority estimates its annual loss of revenue from the blockade of Gaza at $500 million, representing around 42 per cent of the estimated donor funded budget support to the Authority in 2010.

There is, however, a limit as to how far the Palestinian Authority, with the financial support of the donor community, can move the reform agenda without a meaningful peace process and a negotiated settlement. At one point, the fundamental issues that stand in the way of a two-State solution must be negotiated and resolved, paving the way for a Palestinian State. Norway strongly supports the efforts by the United States of America to resume the negotiations and will continue to work with the international donor community to make sure that support for the two-year plan remains intact. However, the unconditional support of donors cannot be taken for granted. Unless the donor community sees a strong determination by the parties to enter into a meaningful peace process with a timeline for the completion of negotiations and the two-State solution, willingness to continue funding the Palestinian State-building project will erode, undermining all that we have achieved over the past 17 years.

When it comes to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, warnings that we are at a critical juncture have over the years not been in short supply. But I would like to point out one element that has changed the picture. The notion of a Palestinian State has over these years evolved from merely a concept, through a possibility, and now, judging from the reports to the AHLC meeting yesterday, to a reality within reach. The Palestinian Authority has provided us with a timeline for the completion of the State-building process. It is time for the parties to provide us with a timeline for the completion of the final status negotiations.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Loulichki (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish at the outset to thank you, Sir, for having convened this open debate as part of the intensified programme of the Japanese presidency of the Security Council for this month, especially in the light of the current delicate situation in the Middle East. I wish also to thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his comprehensive briefing on recent developments in the region.

It is only natural that we support the statements made by the representative of Kuwait on behalf of the Group of Arab States, by the representative of Syria on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. Nonetheless, I wish to make a number of points in my national capacity.

Let me begin by saying that no neutral observer of recent developments in the Middle East could fail to notice the stark contrast between the international community's tireless, constant efforts and initiatives, on the one hand, and the unfortunate facts on the ground, on the other. Every time there are prospects on the horizon for the peace process to move forward, the Israeli party takes opposing measures in order to block and stifle those positive efforts to resume the negotiating process in their infancy. The international community has repeatedly taken note of the very grave decisions taken by Israel over the past two months. In addition, however, only a few days after the decision taken by the ministerial-level Arab Peace Initiative Committee at the beginning of March, and despite all attempts and measures to counter this, Israel announced its immoral and illegal decision to construct 1,600 additional housing units in East Jerusalem.

Following that, the most recent Arab summit, held in early April in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, took several important decisions, including a reaffirmation that negotiation remains a strategic option for the Arab side to regain usurped rights and consequently to achieve the just and comprehensive peace desired by all. But instead of responding positively, the Israeli side chose a policy of escalation and took an extremely grave decision last week, declaring its intention to deport tens of thousands of Palestinians from the West Bank, thus labelling them foreigners in their own land and declaring their presence there illegitimate.

However, however grave they are, these decisions are further links in a long chain of procrastination on these issues. This can only lead to further deterioration of the situation and to the further strengthening of extremism and violent fundamentalism, thus hindering dialogue and weakening the prospect of peace that would enable the Palestinians to regain their legitimate rights under the aegis of the international community and within the framework of international legitimacy. It is evident that the recent decisions taken by Israel were only meant to stall negotiations and vitiate the process, particularly because those who wish to see the negotiations succeed and an independent State established on the Palestinians' own land will be deported from that land.

Based on our responsibility under the leadership of His Majesty the King of Morocco as Chair of the Al-Quds Committee, we reiterate our serious concern over the grave decisions that the Israeli authorities continue to take in East Jerusalem. In this regard, we are also following with grave concern the escalation of the illegitimate settler policies in the occupied Palestinian territories in general and in East Jerusalem in particular, in an attempt to change the demographic composition of the city, to create a new fait accompli and to reduce the contiguous Arab presence as much as possible. This in turn undermines the possibility of establishing a viable Palestinian State.

In its insistence on these unilateral actions, Israel has continued its rejected campaign against Islamic holy sites, targeting the Al-Aqsa mosque by covering up provocative actions by Israeli extremists to prevent people from safely reaching houses of prayer, and by its ongoing excavations and tunnelling under and around the Al-Aqsa mosque.

In this context, my delegation has previously expressed its total rejection of the recent decision to place Islamic sites in Hebron and Bethlehem on the list of Israeli heritage sites, which is a direct provocation to the feelings of hundreds of millions of Muslims and of all those who advocate peace and coexistence in the holy city. Considering the central position of Jerusalem in the Middle East crisis and its symbolic value to all religions, we appeal to the international community, and especially the Security Council, to shoulder their responsibility and translate their words into action to put an end to these practices, in order to pave the way to meaningful and firm negotiations.

The international community's awareness of the gravity of the recent developments in the occupied Palestinian territories and the resulting consequences for international peace and security should be accompanied by firmer and more effective positions that guarantee the minimum necessary for a relaunch of genuine negotiations that preserve the vital mutual interest of all peoples of the region to live in an environment of peace, security and cooperation.

In order to attain this objective, the Kingdom of Morocco will continue to carry out its best efforts within the framework of the Arab Peace Initiative Committee, with a view to achieving a comprehensive and lasting solution through negotiations on final status issues, particularly with regard to Jerusalem, considering its importance and status. However, such a just and comprehensive solution can come about only with Israel's withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories, including the Syrian Golan and the occupied Lebanese territories, and with the establishment of a viable and independent Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital.

We continue to follow with great interest the intensified efforts of the United States and the Quartet, and we take note of the obstacles on the path of the negotiating process. We also value other international efforts, including those of the European Union, and hope that they will lead to the launch of new, serious and genuine negotiations, based on relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map, which all have the blessing of the international community.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Mashabane (South Africa): Allow me, Sir, to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council during the month of April.

I would like to join others in expressing our sincere condolences to the People's Republic of China on the loss of life caused by the earthquake.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. We also wish to thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his comprehensive briefing on the situation in the Middle East.

As we have stated many times before, it is our strong view that the Security Council should shoulder its responsibility in this matter in a fair, just and consistent manner. As we meet here today, the insecurity in the Middle East continues to affect the occupied Palestinian territories and the State of Israel, as well as the Middle East region as a whole. This insecurity is the result of the continued illegal occupation of the Palestinian territory by the State of Israel, the continuation of the unlawful blockade of the Gaza Strip, the unlawful settlement activities within the occupied territories of Palestine, the failure to address the legitimate right of return of Palestinian refugees in the diaspora, as well as the continuation of retaliatory Qassam rocket attacks from the Palestinian territory into Israel. These activities are compounded by the failure to achieve a negotiated settlement with respect to the occupied Palestinian territory.

The South African Government has noted with concern Israel's recent settlement announcement regarding East Jerusalem and its decision to declare the holy shrines in Hebron and Bethlehem in the West Bank as national heritage sites.

South Africa maintains that these settlement activities and the decision by Israel regarding these holy shrines in two West Bank cities erode trust and threaten the peace process. These actions by Israel constitute yet another attempt to extend its control over the West Bank and create a new reality on the ground. South Africa reiterates that these actions on the part of Israel make a resumption of negotiations in the stalled Middle East peace process difficult and undercut the confidence and trust required to take the process forward. We therefore call on Israel to cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory immediately and to abstain from further actions in East Jerusalem that could lead to an escalation of violence in the region.

My delegation also notes with concern the activities and policies of the Israeli Government and its military forces aimed at creating a new reality on the ground. These provocative and defiant actions of the occupying Power — as witnessed in its settlement policies, recent orders threatening the deportation of thousands of Palestinians, aerial raids on Palestinian areas and the illegal blockade on Gaza — continue to cause suffering and destruction and adversely impact health and educational services and the socio-economic and humanitarian situation in Palestine.

South Africa is deeply concerned about Israel's prohibition of the importation of construction materials into Gaza, which undermines and negatively impacts reconstruction efforts following the devastating and destructive attacks on Gaza. As an occupying Power, Israel has specific and clear obligations under international law. The international community's demand that Israel end the illegal blockade, which has exacerbated the suffering of ordinary civilians, must complied with. The blockade and the restrictions imposed are in violation of international humanitarian law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, and contrary to the will of the international community, as expressed in resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1515 (2003) and in the Arab Peace Initiative.

My delegation welcomes the recent meeting of the Quartet held on 19 March 2010 in Moscow and the ongoing efforts of the Government of the United States of America to launch proximity talks that should lead to negotiations with a view towards resolving all final status issues.

In conclusion, South Africa maintains that the creation of a viable and independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, existing side by side the State of Israel within the 4 June, 1967, armistice borders, as well as the complete withdrawal of Israel from all occupied Arab territories, including the West Bank and East Jerusalem, as encompassed in resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), along with a guarantee of the right of return of all Palestinian refugees as set forth in General Assembly resolution 194 (III), is the only means of finding a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the conflict in the Middle East.

In this regard, mere words and good will from the international community are no longer good enough. Meaningful action to bring about peace in the Middle East and the realization of Palestine's legitimate expectation of statehood is required. Israel must be held accountable for its actions. Action on the part of the Security Council, which shoulders the noble responsibility of securing international peace and security, would certainly be a step in that direction.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Haroon (Pakistan): At the outset, I would like to express our condolences to the Chinese delegation for the loss of life and property in the earthquake that struck China today. Our hearts go out to the victims.

The Pakistani delegation would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your successful handling of the work of the Security Council during your presidency. We also thank you for convening this very important meeting.

We would also like to express our appreciation to Mr. Lynn Pascoe for his invaluable insights on the current situation in the region.

Pakistan would like to associate itself with the statements made by the representatives of Egypt and Syria on behalf of the Non-Alignment Movement and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, respectively.

The Middle East question and the plight of the Palestinians have remained a major challenge for the international community for many years. After seven decades of futility in addressing this challenge, one has to say that, if nothing else, at least a consensus for peace seems to be emerging in the international community. The statements that we have heard so far this morning confirm our recognition that this must be so. The question now is how to convert our collective desire for peace into a credible action plan for a wider political settlement that would end the cycle of violence and conflict in the region.

Without an end to mutual suspicion and discord, I am not sure that a durable and viable political settlement could actually take place. It would require the international community to unequivocally call upon Israel to check the policies of its occupying forces that have converted the sacred land into a complex of checkpoints, roadblocks, siege and separation walls. These policies have compounded the humanitarian plight of the Palestinian people by disrupting and adding misery to their already miserable lives.

This does not augur well for developing a peaceful atmosphere. In addition to an improvement in the humanitarian situation, it is essential that any provocative measures taken by the authorities cease. Such measures include settlement activity, especially in and around East Jerusalem, and a growing trend to alter the status of centuries-old places of prayer — mosques, churches and cemeteries of the Palestinian people. These provocations neutralize the voices of peace and accord. These provocations also resonate as a loud political statement of utter disregard for the norms of international law and respect for heritage, culture, history and traditions.

More disquieting are the latest reports of the imposition of a military order that empowers the occupying forces to arbitrarily expel the Palestinian people from the West Bank and Gaza. Of late, the world has been riddled with extrajudicial, extra-constitutional and other such activities; this order is the latest among them. Imposed under the garb of so-called additional legal oversight, this order will be a new tool for deporting and imprisoning the Palestinian people. Such a measure will not only vitiate the atmosphere, which needs to be conducive to the cause of peace, but also raise doubts about the commitment of Israel to a negotiated political settlement.

The cessation of repressive and provocative measures is essential to building an environment that is conducive to implementing the strategies of peace within given timelines. In this context, we have taken positive note of the strategy outlined in the statement issued by the Middle East Quartet in Moscow on 19 March 2010. However, the Quartet must now back its words with greater political drive for a sustained dialogue towards the final settlement, in accordance with relevant Security Council resolutions.

We believe that the Quartet's commitments do not obviate the role of the Security Council, but reinforce it. We hope that the Council, in accordance with its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, will continue to strive for the implementation of its relevant resolutions.

In conclusion, let me reiterate Pakistan's full support for a lasting peace for all the inhabitants of the

region and our strong commitment to the realization of an independent, sovereign and viable State of Palestine, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, living side by side and in complete peace with all its neighbours.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mr. Núñez Mosquera (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to thank Mr. Pascoe for his presentation to us today. We would like to join others in offering our condolences to the people and Government of the People's Republic of China on the earthquake that just occurred there. The Cuban people express their solidarity with the people of China.

Cuba associates itself with the statement by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The Security Council periodically reviews the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. However, little progress has been achieved. The situation in the region, particularly in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, is marked by instability and insecurity.

Israel's ongoing illegal occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories remains the major obstacle to achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region. In flagrant violation of international law and counter to the objectives of the peace process, Israel, the occupying Power, continues its illegal construction of the wall along the West Ban and, in particular, in and around East Jerusalem, among other things.

The settlement activities, even after the partial and temporary moratorium proclaimed in November 2009, have continued uninterrupted. At present, over 3,700 housing units are under construction and more than 200 Palestinian homes have been demolished to carry out these illegal activities.

Cuba expresses great concern at the ongoing demolition by Israel of Palestinian homes and the eviction of Palestinian families in East Jerusalem, as well as other illegal acts of incitement, provocation and aggression by extremist settlers against the Palestinian population and sacred places. This makes the current situation very volatile and dangerous.

The great physical, economic and social devastation caused by these illegal and destructive colonization practices have a profound effect on the peace process and may prejudice the outcome of an agreement on the final status of Jerusalem.

Such measures and policies carried out by Israel constitute serious and flagrant violations of international law, the Charter of the United Nations, the numerous General Assembly and Security Council resolutions and the 9 July 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice.

The international community, including the Security Council, must urgently act in response to these dangerous illegal measures adopted by Israel, which are aimed at hindering and putting an end to the peace initiatives, even before they begin, with the objective of continuing to consolidate its unlawful occupation of Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and carrying out a de facto annexation of more Palestinian land.

Israel cannot be allowed to continue to perpetrate serious and flagrant breaches of international law with impunity. The international community must demand that Israel comply with its obligations, including those arising from the Fourth Geneva Convention, and put an end to all its illegal policies and practices in occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

The situation in the Gaza Strip, after the brutal attack perpetrated by Israel a year ago, is unsustainable. The imposition by Israel of closings and restrictions on the free circulation and access of people and goods, including humanitarian and medical supplies, has made the recovery and reconstruction of the area virtually impossible and has further affected the already precarious living conditions of the population.

The international community cannot remain indifferent. It must take all possible practical measures to ensure that Israel puts an end to these inhuman and illegal policies, which heighten the tensions in the Palestinian population. Once again, Cuba calls for Israel to lift the cruel and illegal blockade and allow the free entry of supplies into the Gaza Strip.

Cuba reaffirms that all measures or actions taken or to be taken by Israel, the occupying Power, aimed at changing the legal, physical and demographic composition of the occupied Syrian Golan and its

institutional structure, as well as the Israeli measures to exercise jurisdiction and administrative power there, are null and void and have no legal effect.

We also reaffirm that all those measures and actions, including the illegal construction and expansion of Israeli settlements in the Syrian Golan since 1967, constitute violations of international law, international agreements, the Charter and resolutions of the United Nations, including Security Council resolution 497 (1981), and of the Fourth Geneva Convention, as well as a challenge to the international community. Cuba demands that Israel withdraw completely from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967.

Cuba once again reiterates its position in support of a just and lasting peace for all peoples of the Middle East that would put an end to the occupation of all Arab territories by Israel since 1967 and guarantee the Palestinian people's exercise of their self-determination by establishing an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Ali (Malaysia): Mr. President, let me first congratulate you on your presidency of this Council and, secondly, align myself and my delegation with the statements by the representatives of Egypt and Syria, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, respectively. Thirdly, I would like to extend our condolences to the People's Republic of China for the loss of life and damage caused by the most recent earthquake.

By constructing thousands of new illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, Israel is killing off whatever hopes there are for peace in the Middle East. In so doing, Israel has put itself firmly on the wrong side of history, whereas everyone else around the world has moved or is moving towards peace. These actions have also subjected it to unprecedented and unanimous condemnation by the entire international community, at a level of ferocity hitherto unprecedented.

Israel has found itself completely isolated. But most disturbingly, Israel's intransigence in building these settlements is another example fitting a general pattern of behaviour proving its general unwillingness to undertake any measures that may lead to peace, which first and foremost requires compromise. Other examples include the building of the separation wall, which snakes into Palestinian territory; the eviction of Palestinian families and the demolition of Palestinian homes; the revocation of residency rights of Palestinian inhabitants of East Jerusalem, forbidding them to live in the city of their birth; the new Israeli military order which will give the Israeli occupying forces the power to deport Palestinians in the West Bank who are deemed to be infiltrating the occupied territory; and, incessant attacks on Palestinians by illegal Israeli settlers, and the lack of law enforcement by Israeli authorities to stop or even prevent such attacks.

It is apparent that such behaviour defies numerous Security Council resolutions, which call upon Israel to cease and desist and to comply with and abide by international law and the Fourth Geneva Convention. Above all, it pre-empts the viable two-State solution by changing the facts on the ground. Hence, the international community, including the Security Council, must hold Israel accountable for its illegal actions and put an end to this occupation.

The blockade imposed by Israel in war-wrecked Gaza is a form of collective punishment forbidden by international law. It has forced 1.5 million Gazans to live in deplorable conditions. We urge Israel to lift this inhumane blockade in order to allow the movement of essential goods, including construction materials. In addition, it is imperative for the parties concerned and the relevant United Nations bodies, including the Security Council, to undertake actions in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 64/10 and 64/254 in order to ensure accountability by bringing the perpetrators identified in the Goldstone report (A/HRC/12/48) to justice.

Resolving these issues requires the international community to focus all its energy and efforts on restoring comprehensive peace in the region and the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to an independent State of Palestine. This requires, inter alia, the political will of this Council to bring into effect the Council's very own resolutions.

The President: I call on the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Al Habib (Islamic Republic of Iran): Allow me at the beginning to join previous speakers to convey our condolences and sympathy to the

delegation of China for the tragic earthquake that occurred today in its country.

At the outset, I wish to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your presidency and for having convened this open debate at this critical juncture. The issue under discussion is of paramount importance, and this meeting is all the more important because it is being held at a time when the fate of the Palestinian people is at stake due to different ineffectual peace proposals and the continuation of the most heinous brutalities against that people, particularly in Gaza and East Jerusalem. Although more than a year has passed since the end of the brutal attack on Gaza, reconstruction of the destroyed and damaged areas, buildings and infrastructure remains nearly impossible due to the Israeli regime's continuing blockade. Relief agencies in Gaza continue to work in a very harsh environment to help those in desperate need, in particular the children, women and other vulnerable people in the region.

The problem of the Middle East is not a lack of peace plans, but rather the lack of a correct understanding and reading of the root cause of the crisis. As we have mentioned repeatedly, the fundamental problem of this long-standing crisis is the illegitimate occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories and the Israeli regime's intransigence with respect to every single principle of international law. Furthermore, persistent attempts to introduce external elements as the main factors hindering the so-called peace process and the preservation of stability in the region, with a view to diverting attention from the root cause of the crisis and to evading its crimes and responsibilities, have been an integral part of the Israeli regime's policies since its unblessed birth.

Israeli officials, in line with this policy, instead of answering to world public opinion of their unparalleled record of non-compliance with all humanitarian and human rights principles and their long and dark catalogue of crimes and atrocities — including occupation, aggression, militarism, State terrorism, and crimes against humanity — have always embarked on making inflammatory remarks and baseless allegations against other countries. It is now widely recognized that the Israeli regime's clandestine development and unlawful possession of between 100 to 300 nuclear warheads, and its constant threats to use them against certain countries, pose a uniquely grave threat to regional and international peace and security.

The blatant support of certain Powers for the Israeli regime is one of the bitterest realities of our world today. By blocking any action against the inhumane policies and acts of this regime in each and every corner of the world, its supporters have given it a blank check to freehandedly violate, in an atmosphere of impunity, all internationally recognized rights of the Palestinian people and other peoples of the region.

Turning to the issue of Palestine, it is regrettable to witness that the inaction of relevant United Nations organs in dealing with the Israeli regime's illegal policies and practices has emboldened that dangerous regime to continue its crimes against the defenceless Palestinian people. The systematic acquisition of Palestinian lands through unlawful policies and practices, the killing and injury of hundreds of Palestinians, and causing an unprecedented humanitarian crisis in Palestine are part and parcel of the normal activities of this brutal regime.

Persistent assaults against the Islamic and Christian holy places in Jerusalem; the continued construction of the separation wall and excavation work in and around the Holy Mosque; the revocation of Palestinian residency rights in the city; the forced eviction of Palestinian families from the city; and the imposition of severe restrictions on movement are but some of the illegal acts carried out by the Israeli regime in the West Bank.

Despite strong international condemnation, illegal settlements are being expanded much faster than they were in the past, and more and more Palestinian houses are being demolished. The illegal decision of the said regime to build new housing units is a move that is undoubtedly geared at altering the demographic composition and architectural, cultural and religious character of the Palestinian territories, particularly in Jerusalem and its surrounding areas.

There is an urgent need to put an end to these acts. There should be no room for criminals who are motivated to commit atrocities. This Council should live up to its responsibilities in supporting the Palestinians and relieving them of their long suffering under occupation.

With regard to the follow-up to the Goldstone report (A/HRC/12/48), we particularly hope that, within the coming months as United Nations bodies review the report again, those members of the Security Council who rock-solidly and unwaveringly support

the Israeli regime in total disregard of the norms and principles of international human rights and international humanitarian law will adjust their positions to the growing international demand for justice and the prosecution of the Gaza war criminals.

The Israeli regime has persisted in its aggressive and expansionist policies towards Lebanon by constantly violating Lebanon's land, sea and air space and by refusing to withdraw from occupied Lebanese land in the Sheba'a, the Kfar Shouba hills and the northern part of Al-Ghajar village. It is also continuing its occupation of the Syrian Golan. That regime should immediately and fully withdraw from those occupied territories in compliance with the basic principles of international law and the United Nations Charter.

Before concluding, I would like to react to the reference made about my country by the representative of the Israeli regime this morning. I would like to put it on record that my delegation rejects the baseless allegations and distortions she expressed. This is yet another tired practice by that regime to distract the attention of the international community from its nuclear arsenal, as well as its criminal policies and abhorrent atrocities in the region, including its recent heinous crimes against the people of Palestine and Lebanon.

Attaining a peaceful and just settlement of the question of Palestine is imperative for the realization of a comprehensive and lasting peace and stability in the Middle East and beyond. In our view, a lasting peace in Palestine and the region is possible through justice, an end to discrimination and an end to the occupation of Palestine and other occupied territories. Today, we need to act collectively to demonstrate our wholehearted support for the cause of Palestine and rally to assist those who have been deprived of their rights. Let us hope that the oppression and occupation will end and justice and freedom will prevail in the occupied Palestinian territory.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Nicaragua.

Mr. Rosales Díaz (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like first to convey the condolences of the Government of Nicaragua to our sister nation of China for the earthquake that occurred this morning. I would also like to congratulate you on your presidency of the Security Council and to thank you for convening this meeting on the situation in the Middle Ea including the question of Palestine.

Nicaragua, as a member of the Non-Align Movement, fully associates itself with the statem made by the Permanent Representative of Egypt Chair of our Movement. I would also like to thank t Under-Secretary-General for Political Affai Mr. Lynn Pascoe, for the briefing he gave the Coun this morning.

Once again, Nicaragua reiterates its profou condemnation of Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese territories, and demand its immediate withdrawal. We condemn t Israeli policies and practices of construction a non-dismantling of settlements, as well as the inhum blockade of Gaza and the policy of breaking up t West Bank and other Palestinian territories. Havi converted the Gaza Strip into a cemetery, t occupying army has launched a policy aimed completely crushing the Palestinian people with t construction of 1,600 new settlements in E Jerusalem, breaching international law, particularly t Fourth Geneva Convention. Israel has also illegal and provocatively designated two sacred places in t occupied Palestinian territory as belonging to Isra national heritage.

As if this were not enough, the occupying for has decided to proceed with mass expulsions promulgating a military order, which, if implemente would mean that tens of thousands of Palestinia would be arrested and illegally expelled from th homes in the West Bank. This order is not mere illegal and in violation of human rights; its wording so general that, in theory, it would enable the Isra army to deport all the Palestinian inhabitants of t West Bank by classifying them as infiltrators, th achieving the aim of cleansing the entire West Bank its Arab population.

Nicaragua rejects and roundly condemns t illegal expansion of settlements and the expulsion Palestinian inhabitants, and categorically denounc Israeli plans and actions aimed at the demograph re-engineering of East Jerusalem by cleansing it of Arab characteristics. This is further proof that for Isr the two-State solution, living side by side, is not option. Israel, ignoring the international outrage, contravention of the most basic rules of internatio law, is violating the Charter of the United Nations a

every human rights law and ignoring the relevant United Nations resolutions — as well as the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, which declared the wall to be illegal — thus perpetuating the hardline and brutal occupation of Palestine.

For some inexplicable reason, many developed countries, supposedly in favour of human rights, maintain political, economic and military support for Israel, thus rewarding it for its conduct, such as, for example, the updating of the agreement with the European Union and the invitation to Israel to join the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. It is unacceptable to see the total impunity with which Israeli actions and policies have been carried out over the last 60 years, and demonstrating the surprising incapacity of the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Jayasekara (Sri Lanka): At the outset let me express our condolences to the Government and people of China on the loss of lives and property due to the devastating earthquake today.

Permit me to congratulate your delegation, Mr. President, on the assumption of the presidency of the Security Council. We also wish to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs for his briefing.

My delegation believes that a resolution of the Palestinian issue is crucial for restoring peace in the entire Middle East, with implications elsewhere. Sri Lanka has consistently supported peaceful settlement of the Palestinian issue and called on all sides to fully implement the resolutions adopted by the Council and the General Assembly regarding the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and the realization of the two-State solution. Our hope is that the day will soon come when Israel, Palestine and their other regional neighbours can coexist in peace and harmony.

We remain deeply concerned at the daily widespread suffering and hardships that the Palestinian people continue to endure as a result of the economic blockade and the ensuing grave situation in the occupied Palestinian territory. While we note the relaxation of some restrictions by the Israeli Government, we call for the removal of all restrictions. Further relaxations could enhance the confidence level of all concerned. The Palestinian people have suffered for too long and continue to live under occupation, denial of their fundamental right to statehood, w has been recognized by the United Nations, du continued Israeli occupation has seriously affe progress in the socio-economic indicators for population in Gaza and the West Bank, including Jerusalem.

In that context, my delegation believes tha peace is to be viable and sustainable in the Palest territory, Israel must withdraw from all occu Palestinian territories back to the 1967 borders. It end the economic blockade, the illegal expansio settlements and the construction of the separation Changing the demographic character of the Palest territory will only increase tension and animosity i entire Middle East region.

The Palestinian Authority needs to continue implementation of its security plan and make e effort it can to improve law and order and ensure its territory is not used for illegal attacks on Is civilians. Allegations of illegal arms flows mus investigated. Both sides must do everything possib ensure the safety and security of civilians.

Sri Lanka reiterates its support for the Palest National Authority under the leadership of Pres Mahmoud Abbas. We stress the need to preserve protect national and democratic institutions, whic vital to a future independent Palestinian State. therefore urge Palestinian groups to act speedil reconcile and reunite within the framework of Palestinian National Authority. Unity among Palestinian people is their strength.

My delegation supports international ef towards the early resumption of negotiations believes that the unity of the Palestinian peop essential to ensuring proper conditions for resumption of dialogue between Israel and Palesti an early stage. We also urge both sides to ensu climate conducive to the resumption of negotiat We regret that the announcement of new settle construction has resulted in a setback to the pro that has been made.

We also remain concerned about the situatio the occupied Syrian Golan, including the pligh Syrian detainees. We call for the implementation o the relevant Security Council resolutions, in parti resolution 497 (1981).

Sri Lanka reiterates its support for lasting peace in the Middle East, including the peaceful settlement of the Palestinian issue.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Zahir Tanin, Vice-Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mr. Tanin: Before I begin, I would like to take a brief moment to pay tribute to those who lost their lives in the earthquake that took place today in western China. As reports continue to come in, it is clear that this tragic event and its consequences will have serious effects on tens of thousands of lives, in addition to the hundreds killed and thousands injured. The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People stands in solidarity with the people of China as they work to rebuild. I would like to offer the Chinese delegation our deepest sympathies and our full support today and in the days and months to come.

In my capacity as Vice-Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, on the exemplary manner in which you have been steering the work of the Council during this month. I would also like to express my appreciation to Ambassador Emmanuel Issoze-Ngondet of Gabon for the efficient manner in which he presided over Council during the month of March.

On behalf of the Committee, I would like to express my appreciation to the Secretariat for its monthly briefings on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. Such briefings serve a useful practical purpose, as they reflect the latest developments on the ground and the efforts of various stakeholders in the international community to move the peace process forward.

Sadly, as we meet here today there appears to be little hope for a serious turnaround in the all-too-familiar pattern of events on the ground. Violence continues to affect the lives of Palestinians and Israelis. The Committee has condemned the use by Israel of its military might against the occupied Palestinian people, be it through the bombing of areas in Gaza, incursions into Palestinian cities in the West Bank and Gaza, or dispersing non-violent protestors in front of the separation wall built illegally on Palestinian land. The Committee has also been unequivocal in condemning the indiscriminate firing of rockets by Palestinian groups from Gaza into Israel. Violence from both sides has to stop.

The Committee also considers it alarming and totally unacceptable that the Government of Israel continues to flagrantly dismiss numerous calls by members of the international community, including the Quartet, to halt its illegal settlement activity in the occupied West Bank, and especially in East Jerusalem. Prime Minister Netanyahu's latest statements in that regard send a clear message to the international community that the Israeli strategy is to continue to build in Jerusalem in violation of international law. At the same time, the occupying Power has continued to displace Palestinian residents in East Jerusalem through illegal house demolitions, evictions and revocations of residency rights.

The Committee is also seriously concerned about the new Israeli military order that went into effect yesterday, threatening thousands of residents in the West Bank with deportation. The order is part of the Israeli policy of consolidating and perpetuating its occupation of Palestinian land through forced displacement of the population. Implementing the order would constitute a breach of the Forth Geneva Convention, in particular article 49, which prohibits individual or mass forcible transfers and deportations of protected persons from occupied territory.

It is absolutely clear that, by creating such facts on the ground, the occupying Power is undermining efforts to restart the political process and predetermining the outcome of sensitive permanent-status negotiations on the status of Jerusalem. That approach renders any such negotiations devoid of purpose. In the same vein, Israel's actions and policy on the issue of settlements are a serious threat to the concept of achieving a permanent settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of the two-State solution. It is obvious that those illegal and provocative actions of the Israeli leadership are also directly undermining current efforts to relaunch the political process between the parties.

The Committee fully supports the demand of the Middle East Quartet that Israel freeze all settlement activity, dismantle outposts and refrain from illegal house demolitions and evictions in East Jerusalem. I would like to emphasize here that those are not preconditions for resuming the negotiating process; they are Israeli obligations under the Road Map, as

endorsed by the Council. It is hoped that the 10-month freeze in settlement expansion declared by the Israeli Government will be comprehensive, extended to East Jerusalem and retained indefinitely.

I would like to inform the members of the Council that, at the end of March, the Committee convened its annual United Nations seminar on assistance to the Palestinian people. Its goal was to draw the attention of the international community to the programme of the Palestinian Authority entitled "Palestine: Ending the occupation, establishing the State", which has become known as the Fayyad plan. The programme might be understood as the Palestinian answer to Israeli settlement-building, as it aims to unilaterally create positive facts on the ground. Unlike Israel's settlement activity, the Palestinian Authority's programme is consistent with international law, welcomed and supported by the international community and promotes rather than impedes prospects for a peace agreement. The plan reflects the Palestinians' determination to empower themselves by taking their destiny into their own hands and shouldering their share of responsibility by building State institutions under the Israeli occupation with a view to ending it.

This forward-looking programme of the Palestinian Authority deserves the full attention and tangible support of the international community. The Palestinian Authority has proven its ability to transform international support into concrete Government-administered programmes, as demonstrated by the reform of the law and order sector and improved transparency at all levels and in all sectors of its activity. The Fayyad plan is a logical continuation of these efforts.

It has to be borne in mind that this programme is not being implemented in a political vacuum. It is now and will be in the foreseeable future critically affected by developments in the political process. In fact, its success is determined by the measure of progress in the political area. On the international level, support needs to be built for the broad recognition of an independent Palestinian State. At the end of the projected two years of the plan, this recognition could be enshrined in a Security Council resolution clearly determining the borders of the Palestinian State based on the pre-1967 lines.

Our Committee has come out strongly in supp of the Palestinian Authority's State-build programme. We would like to encourage the memb of the Security Council to support the realization this plan, which has already been endorsed by Secretary-General, the Quartet and the League of A States. By putting the weight of its authority beh this plan, the Council will create the necessary politi framework for ending the occupation implementing the two-State solution, with Israel Palestine living side by side in peace and security.

The President: I now give the floor to representative of Tunisia.

Mr. Jomaa (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I sha like to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of presidency of the Security Council for this month wish you every success in your deliberations.

I also extend my sincere condolences to Chinese delegation for the earthquake in China, wh has caused grave loss of life and property.

Since the most recent open debate of the Secu Council on the situation in the Middle East, includ the Palestinian question, held in January, stakeholders in the peace process have made inten efforts and the international community has striven establish conditions conducive to a resumption negotiations in order to end the stalemate in the reg At that time, we looked forward to a détente improvement in the situation that would reactivate negotiations. However, in recent months, a numbe incidents and escalations have further exacerba tensions and the situation in the region.

Israel's intransigent position, intensification settlement activities and recent acts of aggres towards the Palestinian people have undermined eff to relaunch negotiations, despite broad internati support and the efforts of the influential par concerned, especially the United States of America resume indirect talks between the two parties would pave the way towards substantive consultati to address the root causes of the conflict. Th endeavours have been supported by the Arab States statement issued by the follow-up committee on Arab Peace Initiative, embodying a construc position that reflects the eagerness of Arab countrie support any effort to implement the will of peace.

Unfortunately, the ongoing appeals of various States and regional and international organizations have not been met with a positive response from the Israeli occupation forces, which have continued to act provocatively and to disavow agreements and terms of reference previously agreed with a view to attaining a peaceful settlement of the situation. In that respect, I should like to reiterate my country's full condemnation of Israel's policy of maintaining the status quo. I recall in that respect the statement of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali at the recent Arab summit in Sirte, Libya, in which he said that

> "Israel's ongoing acts of provocation, maintenance of the status quo, and deliberate intent to thwart any serious attempt to resume negotiations can only deepen the despair and frustration of the Arabs and of peace-loving nations throughout the world, and will aggravate the regional tensions and stalemate".

I also recall His Excellency's position on the same occasion concerning Tunisia's categorical rejection of Israel's schemes to alter the identity of Jerusalem and to forcefully displace its population, in particular in East Jerusalem, which it occupied in 1967 and seeks today to annex, in flagrant defiance of the will of the international community.

In a statement issued by its Ministry for Foreign Affairs on 11 March, Tunisia denounced the decision of the Israeli Government to build 1,600 settlement units in Jerusalem and the West Bank. This plan was denounced by all parties concerned, including the Secretary-General in his statement of 9 March, the Quartet and a number of regional and international organizations. Despite the clear, firm and unwavering positions adopted in this respect, Israel's illegitimate practices have continued unabated, calling for immediate and decisive intervention on the part of the international community to compel it to respect the resolutions of international legitimacy and its commitments under agreements and resolutions previously concluded.

The maintenance of the deteriorating status quo in the Gaza Strip, which is causing a large-scale humanitarian, economic and social crisis; settlement activities in Jerusalem and the West Bank; the desecration of holy places; the use of force against Palestinian civilians and deprival of their basic rights; the forced displacement of numerous Palestinians in the West Bank and Jerusalem; and Israel's intransigence and the impossible conditions it has set, hindering the resumption of the peace process, will clearly freeze and kill any prospects for the peace we all seek. This is all taking place in a region ill-equipped to endure this tense and deteriorating situation, which is a real cause of alarm and the source of tangible problems and tension on the ground.

Tunisia reiterates once again its call on the international partners, foremost among which is the Quartet, to step up their efforts to force Israel to end its acts of provocation and to engage seriously in the peace efforts. On the basis of its adherence to the principles of peace, justice, détente and the will to implement peace, Tunisia calls on the international community to mitigate the suffering of the brotherly Palestinian people by improving their humanitarian, economic and social circumstances. My country reaffirms that a just, comprehensive and lasting peace can be achieved only through dialogue and negotiation, which require the parties to abstain from all acts of provocation and violence and from any activity likely to prejudge the outcome of negotiations on the main substantive issues in the Arab-Israeli conflict, especially the question of Jerusalem and the borders of the future Palestinian State.

The Palestinian question has always been a top priority for Tunisia, which has consistently stood with the brotherly Palestinian people in its just endeavour to recover its national rights and to establish its independent State on its national soil. In that respect, Tunisia reaffirms its support for all serious efforts to find a just and lasting settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict that would restore the occupied Arab territories on the basis of resolutions of international legitimacy and the terms of reference of the peace process, including the Arab Peace Initiative.

With respect to the two sisterly countries of Lebanon and Syria, I reiterate my country's demand that Israel fully withdraw from Syrian and Lebanese territory, in line with the option of attaining a comprehensive settlement of all aspects of the Middle East crisis, and in a way that will provide peace and security for all peoples of the region.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Botswana.

Mr. Ntwaagae (Botswana): Thank you, Sir, for giving me the opportunity to add my voice to the

debate on this vexed subject. Also, allow me to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency for the month of April. My appreciation goes also to the delegation of Gabon for having presided over the work of the Security Council during the month of March.

Like previous speakers, let me also take this opportunity to extend my condolences to the Chinese delegation following the sad disaster of a devastating earthquake.

In Louis Fischer's book entitled *The Essential Gandhi: An Anthology of His Writings on His Life, Work, and Ideas*, Mohandas Mahatma Gandhi ventured into the question of Israel and Palestine with a mixed sense of foreboding. He went on to express his sympathy for the ages-long persecution of the Jewish community, with whom he had developed a rapport and affinity while in exile in South Africa. However, he also observed that the call for a national home for the Jews in the Middle East and the fact that the Arabs sought to call Palestine their home were equally compelling.

What is evident therefore is that neither party was more qualified to impose their will on the other. Gandhi would later say, in 1938, "What is going on in Palestine today cannot be justified by any moral code of conduct". But for generations now, that Middle East region has known no peace, and success in the international community's efforts to resolve the conflict has been elusive.

More than 60 years down the line, we are still struggling with finding a durable solution to the situation in the Middle East, including progress on the question of Palestine. It is inconceivable that people who were born in the same place, as we could be led to understand, and who also have so much in common cannot agree to live peacefully side by side.

As Botswana has stated before on this subject in various forums, there is merit in the two-State solution. We believe that Israel and Palestine must coexist as two sovereign States that share not only a border, but also a common desire for peace, security and prosperity.

We therefore urge the people of the Middle East to summon the necessary will and courage to recognize the folly of war and accept the virtue of dialogue. They should start building a common future for generations that will know no violence or conflict, but will instead recognize the virtues of tolerance, accommodation and concord.

In the interest of peace and the protection of innocent civilian lives, it is necessary that all the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions be given full effect and respect, alongside the strict observance of basic humanitarian principles, international law and international humanitarian law by all parties to the conflict.

Over the years, international diplomatic efforts have intensified with a view to creating an atmosphere conducive to negotiations which are aimed at mutual recognition and achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. We therefore wish to echo the call of the international community for both parties to fulfil their obligations under various international instruments and to refrain from any steps that could undermine the momentum of the negotiations process.

The continuing campaign of violence as well as the unending annexation of new territories in the area are the most undesirable of the ingredients that should be avoided in this delicate procedure of remoulding a peaceful accord. Those who employ such unsavoury tactics risk compromising their own credibility and integrity as genuine and committed partners in the quest for solutions to the Situation in the Middle East and settlement of the question of Palestine.

The responsibility for bringing about transformative change in the Middle East would be the greatest reward, and it is a moral imperative, in contrast with carrying out provocative actions, demolitions and invasions and outdoing one another in the theatre of war. Such change should be brought about so that, for the first time in living memory, the children of that region can also realize their dreams rather than face constant confrontation and difficulty, so that they too, like all children in other parts of the world, can live the dignified lives experienced by their counterparts elsewhere in the world.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. De Las Ovalles Colmenares (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to join in the expressions of distress and condolences on

the earthquake suffered by the fraternal People's Republic of China.

We wish also to thank you, Sir, for the manner in which you have presided over the work of the Security Council and to congratulate you on having convened this debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, under your presidency.

My delegation associates itself with the statement made earlier today by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is convinced of the need for a final, lasting, negotiated solution that will put an end to violence in the region without undermining the rights of peoples including their free and legitimate right to protect their sovereignty. This conflict poses a threat to international peace, and we therefore support initiatives that promote possible talks. To that end it is important to build mutual trust, within the framework of the Road Map, which has a most relevant role to play.

But the Government of Israel must put an end to its settlement policies and accept East Jerusalem as the Palestinian capital.

My Government firmly supports the Palestinian Authority State-building programme. Here, we are against the closures in Gaza and of other border crossings, because they are a violation of international humanitarian law. It is striking that, although on the one hand the Government of Israel has advocated a two-State solution, on the other it announces the construction of homes on Palestinian territory for the Israeli occupiers. In clear violation of international humanitarian law, Israel has engaged in the persecution, detention and deportation of any Palestinian residing in the West Bank. Also, no less than 70,000 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip are now at risk of being separated from their families, their land, their livelihood and their social milieu.

On 24 March, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, addressing the Security Council (see S/PV.6292), stressed that almost all recent disturbances between Israelis and Palestinians have taken place in areas where Israeli forces are present in Palestinian-populated areas. I should make it clear too that the Prime Minister of Israel has ignored the requests of the United Nations and the international community to freeze settlement activity. The closure of Gaza continues to be an unacceptable and inhumane situation that must be rectified immediately. We also support President Mahmoud Abbas's demand that Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem be reopened. The impediments placed in the way of Palestinians in using their land to build homes and engage in agriculture constitute an attack on economic development, which results in a deteriorating situation that poses an ongoing threat to the establishment of a Palestinian State.

The repeated violations, acts of aggression and other Israeli activities against Lebanon also constitute an obvious destabilization policy by Israel in the region. The permanent violation of air space, territory and the territorial waters of Lebanon, as described by the Permanent Representative of Lebanon on 3 March, confirm that these new and continued threats are clearly non-compliant with resolution 1701 (2006). Similarly, we support the Government of Syria in its demand for compliance with resolution 497 (1981) on the Syrian Golan Heights.

International law prevents Israel from invoking conquest and colonization, and to a lesser extent, natural growth to the detriment of neighbouring peoples. The expulsion of the Palestinian people from their own lands is completely inexcusable and constitutes a violation, unparalleled by any episode of modern history, of the most basic principle of humanitarian law. Our Government has, in this context, insisted on the need to consider Chapter II, in particular Articles 5 and 6, of the United Nations Charter.

The Israeli Government has for some time now acted outside the principles of the United Nations and international law and cannot expect to develop its new concept of so-called natural growth with impunity.

Finally, the Palestinian people should, in all fairness, be recognized for their courage in the face of adversity and the double standards of the international community.

The President: There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 4.55 p.m.